The Paris Review

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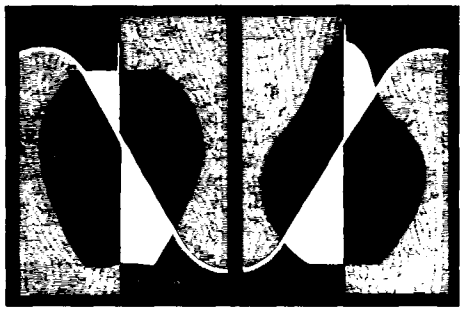

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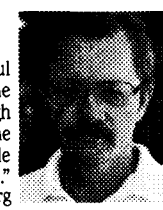

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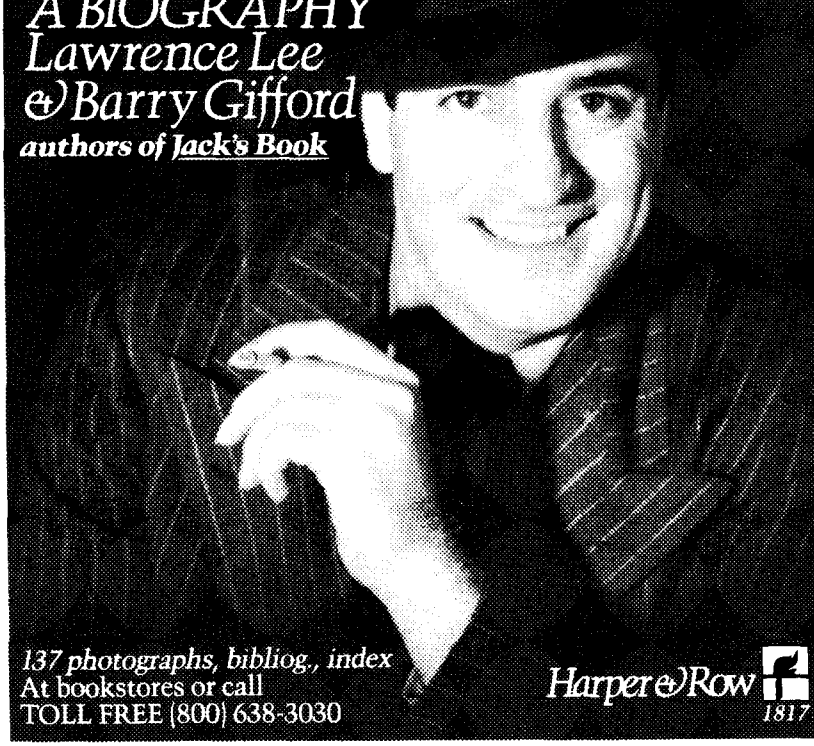

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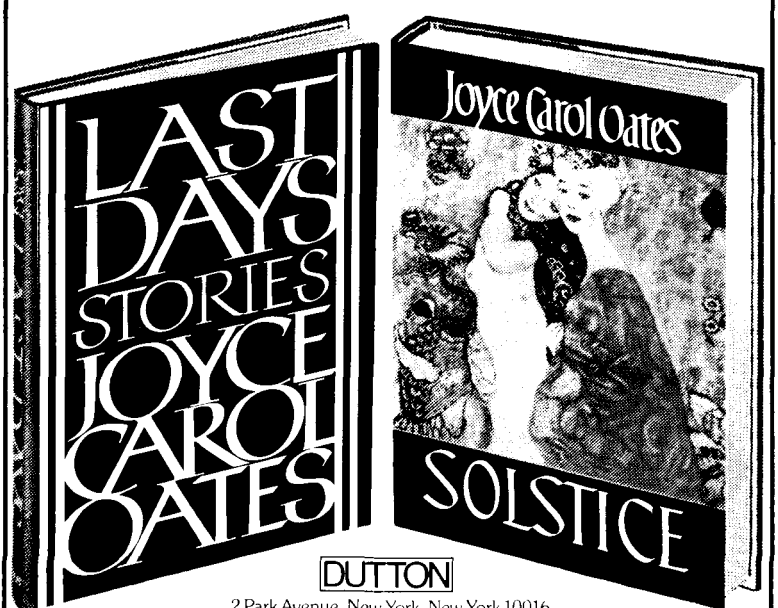

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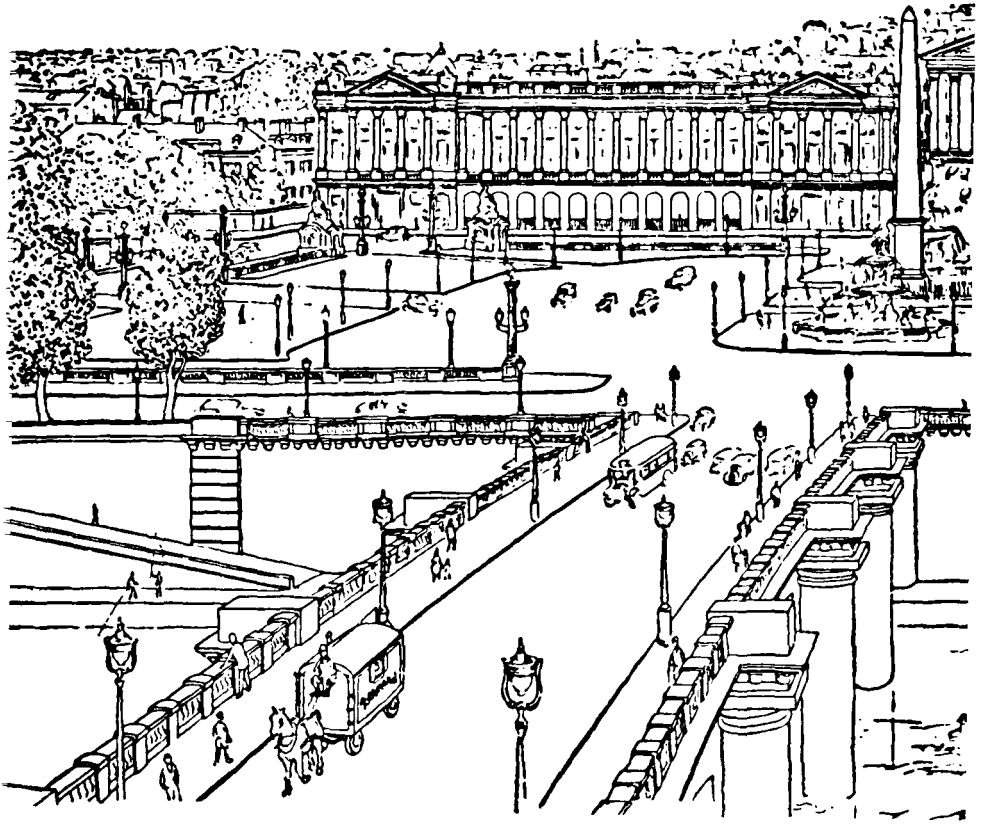

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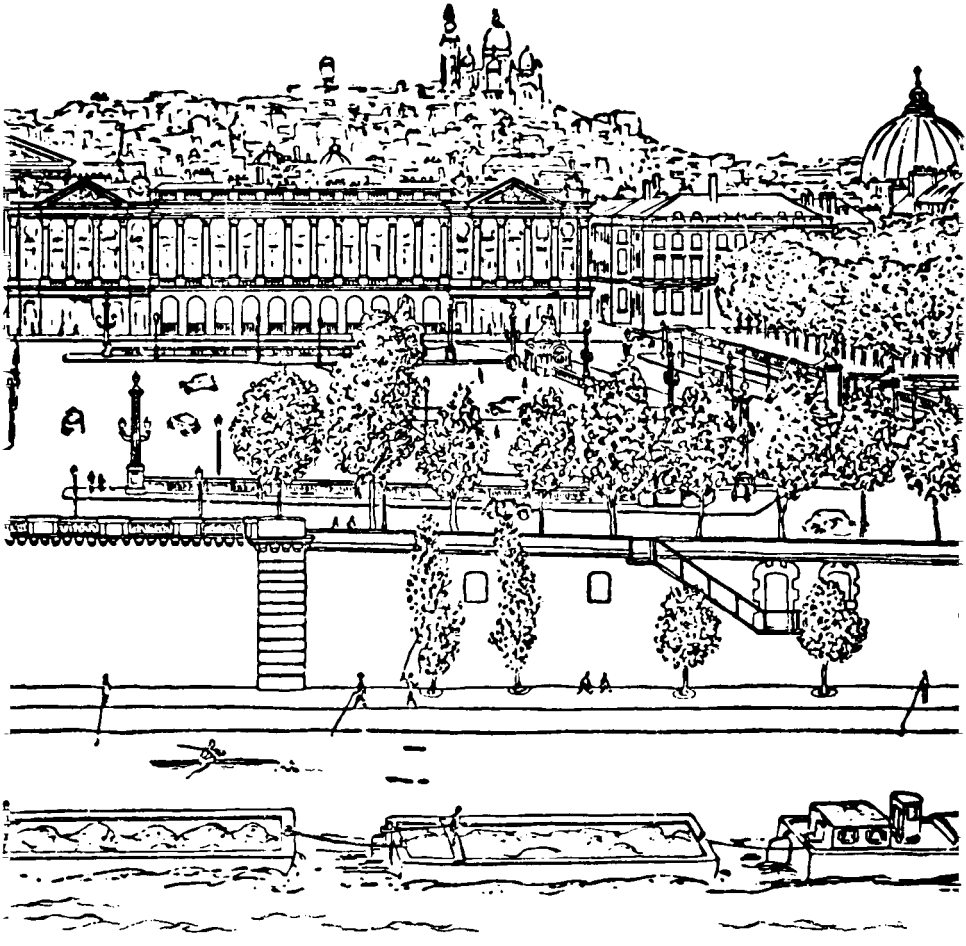

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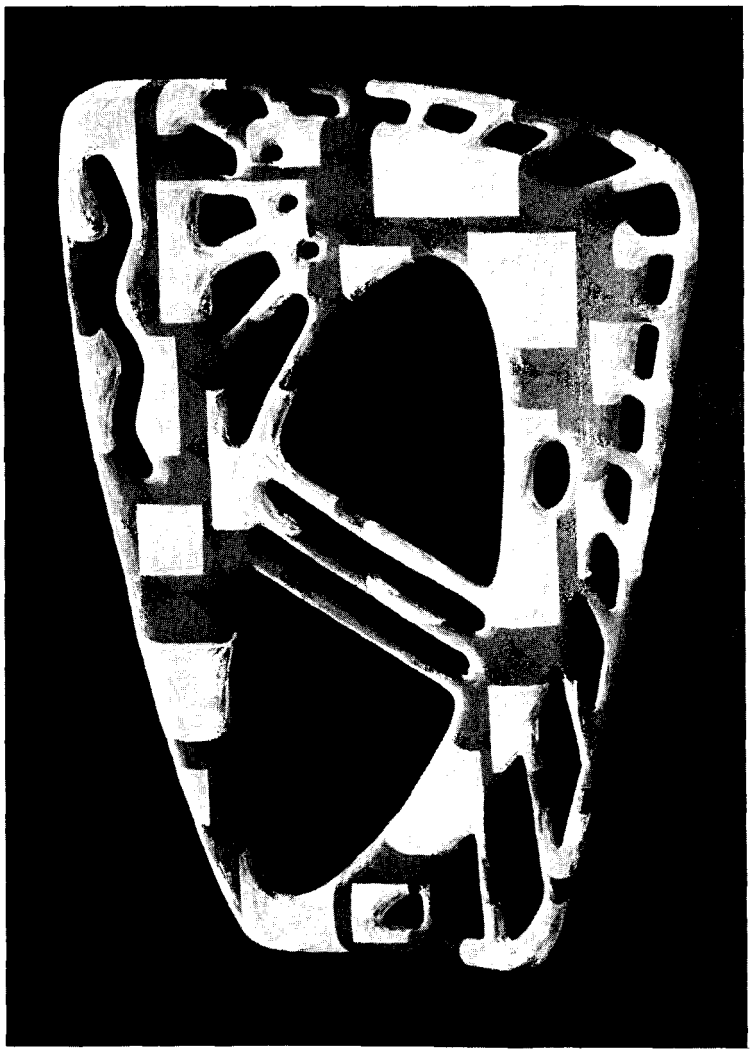

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Monologue of the Movie Mogul

Michael Covino

No sooner had I finished working, finished assembling the final cut of my movie, finished adjusting, finished revamping, finished splicing the last two images together, finished mixing the last two sets of sounds, finished adjusting the last two images to the last two sets of sounds, no sooner had I finished all this and resolved not to shift a single other image, nor to heighten or lower a single other sound, not even the merest chirp of a background cricket which can be so absolutely indispensable in the extramarginal manipulation of the poor moviegoer's mood—the placement of the merest chirp, or of the wrong quality of chirp, over the wrong image, over a hardwood forest (say) instead of over a pine forest, or making that chirp too loud, or too soft, or too shrill, or too deep, can be devastating to the whole effect of the most lavish, big-budget movie, can create a vibration that shakes and rattles the whole structure of the movie, that causes that structure to sway, shudder, and splinter asunder—yes, no sooner had I brought the movie to as satisfactory a state of completion as possible, as coherent an order of images and sounds as I would ever find, than I had to turn

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my full attention *immediately* to the preparations for the big weekend party that I was throwing the next night at my country estate to celebrate the completion of this very picture. I felt spent. Indeed. For a year I had sequestered myself in my editing room with my editors and sound people, and after having pressed my crew to work first ten-hour days six days a week, then twelve-hour days seven days a week, and then sixteen-hour days for months on end, after having driven them like cattle, yelled at them like they were dogs, shouted at them that this cut doesn't measure up, this confluence of dialogue and melancholy patter of rain falls miserably short, that this image of a single sickening tree against the dusk sky—so poetic when isolated—is found wanting in the larger context, after having made them do and then undo the previous night's work not once but dozens of times, *hundreds* of times—and there were times when the slightest distraction would send me into a fury, when I locked into the movie with a singlemindedness they found frightening (but I found exhilarating)—for I worked without stopping, without pause, with a mania and an obsessiveness for detail that is legendary in the industry (and legends can always press for more money), cloistered there in my editing room like a mad monk, because *nothing matters to me but my work*, others work to live but I live to work, indeed I am never happier, never more in love than when I'm working, and love comes from my finest work; yes, after having done all this and then, this past week, thanked all my technicians and ushered them out and then *truly* focused myself for a final one week stint of frightening intensity, of furious concentration, a week during which I barely slept, cutting, recutting, arranging, rearranging, not shaving, not eating, not washing, not changing my underwear, not moving my bowels for days on end, *for the whole week*, reducing my life to the utmost simplicity in order to complete this most complex, this most concentrated of movies, after all this—well!—after all this I felt ready to relax and party a bit.

I telephoned my personal aide, my trusted lieutenant, who had had the good sense, the great tact, the tremendous *decency*, not to disturb me during the past and final week, even

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after the five hundred invitations for the party had gone out and it wasn't at all clear that I would emerge from my editing room with a can of finished film in time to attend the party celebrating my having emerged from the editing room with a can of finished film, yes, I spoke to my lieutenant and told him that I was about to drive across town *from* my editing room *to* my house, where I would then attend to some neglected business matters (the possible collapse of my independent studio if I went any further over budget, some niggling actor's litigation over the profits from my last movie in which he had some points, overdue notes on my mortgaged country estate where the party was to be held, other minor irritants) and afterwards spend the night before driving up the next day to my country estate for the party, and he said "Good," then mentioned in passing that a young visiting documentary director was staying at my house, had in fact been staying there the past few days while his film was screened at the local film archives and some other places. I said, "Fine, I'll be driving over myself," and hung up.

Actually, I already knew that this young filmmaker was staying at my house—I knew because I'd read about it in the so-called society column of our local newspaper's "society columnist," that prattling scandalmonger, that insufferable bilgebag, that *war correspondent* with his daily dispatches from the dinner tables of the very rich, forever issuing his snide or stupid or "clever" items about me from his regular column, from his little plot of turf in that weed patch he writes for, whether it's to hint at my latest mistress (he makes me green with envy of myself), or to dispense the opinions of an "informed industry source" on my latest not yet released—always "unreleasable"—film. Let's change the subject.

The ride across town was a pleasure. After the ardors and rigors of the past few months holed up in the airless, windowless basement editing room, it was a sheer pleasure to be negotiating nothing more complicated than traffic lights and wayward pedestrians in the cool afternoon sunlight. I felt like hitting a few—expendable extras in the over-budget production of life. So a young out-of-town director, a supposed up-

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and-comer, was staying at my house! I was not looking forward to company. When visiting directors are in town they are always welcome to stay at my house, it is a common courtesy I extend to all without expectation of repayment of any kind—certainly not monetary (I don't need it), still less veneration or idolization (hero worship nauseates me)—it doesn't even matter whether I am home; in fact, to be frank, I prefer *not* to be home since these visiting directors—inevitably younger, poorer, unknown, and a bit on the touchy side—usually end up, usually *start up*, asking me for production money, one director I put up later complained bitterly that despite his international reputation in art film circles, *in the art house ghetto*, I wouldn't even spare him ten minutes, which was true enough, his films disgust me, they reflect a certain crepuscular sentimentality, a hidebound romantic insularity—

Nonetheless, my maid is always present, the large refrigerator is kept well-stocked, and they are given the complete run of the house, the ingrates, and my lieutenant even arranges to screen a film or two of theirs in my comfortable basement screening room with all my staff invited.

But now I had to go home and attend to last-minute odds and ends before driving up to my country estate, and a young documentary filmmaker from out of town was staying over, his first film was being screened that week and, according to my lieutenant, had received extraordinary notices in the film quarterlies, which I could care less about. No, I was not looking forward to company. Most of these visiting directors are hopeless young hotheads bubbling over with powerful convictions, staunch theoretical beliefs, art directors who film an interview in which a single person talks in a monotone directly into the camera for a fortnight; and then the director has the nerve to babble to me after the screening about how the uncompromising neutrality of the camera in his film forces the viewer out of his old, easy, comfortable, bourgeois viewing position *blah blah blah*—the poor unsuspecting viewer for whom we should show more love—yes, these directors run on as if boredom is beneath them, is too banal for them to even consider.

Then another one, a very earnest young political filmmaker,

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starts telling me that the recurring images of women and violence in my pictures cannot be used, however critical my intent (and he assured me he did believe my intent was critical!), without some degree of complicity, a certain collusion that reeks of the brothel slaughterhouse. Of course, at a party that very evening, after prevailing upon me all afternoon to look at his film, our young political director was prevailing quite drunkenly upon the young beauty whose beauty I had made capital of in my last box office smash. Bad faith! It is easy to grow cynical in my position, where the supplicant's contradictory demands on his master justify the king's contempt. Yes, these artistic directors speak of how their concerns necessitate their making films that are strictly unviewable, and then they come and sniff around my mansion, poke their noses into my wine cellar, remove their boots and socks in the dead of winter to stick an experimental toe in my heated outdoor pool. For art and business, which might seem separate, are insolubly linked, you cannot separate the problem of finance from the problem of the frame, legal tender from the long take, cash from cutting, or the dollar sign from the dolly shot. Money is articulate. Something else: I find bankers more honest than your average "artistic" director, or your average *cinéaste*, or your average film archivist. At least the banker will let you know in no uncertain terms when your film stinks—money invested is money watched, that is, money whets the senses. Unlike purists and artists, bankers are not contaminated by quaint notions of purity and art.

But neither was this visiting documentary director, according to my lieutenant, who laughingly had told me how this young man had received a large government humanities grant and then one week later received a duplicate check in the mail by mistake, which he did not return but immediately cashed. "A man after your own heart," my lieutenant had chortled, but my lieutenant had better watch it.

I arrived home, parked my car, and went directly into the kitchen for a beer—there were none. The visiting director wandered in—sipping a beer. He was tall but walked swaybacked, no, *hunchbacked*, he had incredibly poor posture, in fact de-

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spite his height he gave exactly the *opposite* impression, the *contrary* impression, that of being a gnome, and his blue right eye, which was dead, drifted aimlessly in its socket while the blue left one simply, *coolly*, fixed on me; to be frank, this unsymmetrical, misshapen, ill-proportioned, *twisted* human form looked like a cretin, a natural idiot if I ever saw one. He mumbled, "Hello," then shambled past me, tossed the beer can in the wastebasket, opened the refrigerator, muttered disappointingly—and was gone. I stood there dumbstruck.

Nevertheless, I got on with my afternoon's business. And over the course of the rest of the afternoon, whenever we would brush past one another, be it in the hallway, or in the living room, *or in the kitchen*, he would sort of shrink back—I won't say he was exactly intimidated by me, but in his shrinking back I sensed a curious, mixed-up disdain, as though he scorned not just me but himself—and not because he was too timid to hustle me, but because he was weak enough, status-conscious enough, *ambivalent* enough, to be there in the first place instead of just putting up in some anonymous suburban motor lodge.

My lieutenant had recommended, very gently, that I view this young director's film before driving up to the party; it wasn't even a feature film but—of all things!—a documentary about the chicken industry and methods of fattening chickens. I made inquiries. An industrial short? Another tiresome exposé of merchandising practices? No, my lieutenant said cautiously, not exactly; but then all he could do was mumble something about "rigorous" and "insidious" and "very funny" and "highly original." But "rigorous" is a word only restaurant reviewers should use, *This rigorous steak*. . . . My lieutenant didn't really push me, he knows when to push and when not to, he himself obviously felt diffident and defensive about it. Besides, he won't go out on a limb for anyone unless he knows there's a safety net spread taut beneath him, and anyway I was incredibly busy that afternoon what with money matters and calling the labs to arrange for answer prints of the film, which was already nine million dollars *over budget* and six months *behind schedule*, the studio executives were howling as usual; but as an older filmmaker once told me, "The eye that knows its business won't

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be told to edit better or faster." Let the interest on the bank loans accumulate; making films and making money are two different things, though to be honest my films have made a bundle. At any rate, this younger director didn't try to sell me a bill of goods so much as skulk and slink around my house, and this to tell the truth got on my nerves worse than if he had been hustling me.

Night fell. Soon I was tired and decided I wanted to sleep in the second floor corner bedroom with the northeast exposure affording a view of the bay—no one bedroom is mine and depending on the seasons, and the weather, and the moon, and my mood, I will sleep in whichever bedroom pleases me. Actually, the more homes I own in different parts of the country the less I feel at home *anywhere*, the more I feel like a vagabond, a rootless wanderer, a forlorn nomad. But this is neither here nor there. I told my maid which bedroom to prepare, and she hesitated just an instant but an instant long enough to make me ask, "What's wrong?" and she explained that nothing was wrong, nothing at all, it was just that the young visiting director had been sleeping in that room, but of course it was no problem, no problem at all, there were more bedrooms to spare—twelve of them in fact—and I nodded and said, "Don't forget to change the sheets."

That night however I felt *uneasy.* The corner bedroom, besides its own bathroom, has two doors which swing open into it, one from the hallway and the other from the adjoining bedroom—into which the visiting director had moved himself—and both doors have keyholes which yield *full unimpeded views of the bedroom.* For some reason, as I sat up in bed late that night reading over company finance reports, I imagined that damned documentary director's single blue eye fixed on his bedroom keyhole watching, scrutinizing, analyzing, *registering*, my every move. I put down the reports. I got up. I turned off the light, climbed back into bed, and then burrowed deep down under the thick, heavy blankets. In the dark I kept *absolutely still.* Nonetheless, I couldn't shake the feeling that his single damned eye was still glued to that keyhole, as if the eye came outfitted with an infrared scope. What a night-

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mare! Nor could I get up and check, for what if I should put my own eyeball to my side of the keyhole and suddenly find myself eyeball to eyeball with that screwball, *then what*? I pondered my dilemma carefully. I thought about it long and hard. *And then it came to me.* I got up, tiptoed into the darkened bathroom, groped in the medicine cabinet for the box of adhesive bandages, and removed two one-inch strips. Darling Band-Aids! I taped one of these over the keyhole to his bedroom, and the other over the keyhole to the hallway—just in case. There! Not for nothing am I considered one of the most resourceful filmmakers in the business. Now I would be able to sleep untroubled.

But I didn't sleep untroubled. *I couldn't sleep.* I started thinking about the film and one cut in particular—from a shot of a seagull flying over a lake at dusk, to a shot of my protagonist staring out the lakeshore window—a cut I'd arranged and then rearranged and *deranged* dozens of times, to no avail, a cut I'd agonized over, and which now, thinking back, I realized was simply execrable. I had to get that damn film out of my head. I thought of the gross of my last movie, of my country estate where even now my dear wife was overseeing the last-minute preparations for tomorrow night's big party in celebration of the movie I had finished this afternoon, that even now I was agonizing over, *that I was just beginning to realize I hadn't yet finished.* I thought of my vast real estate holdings, restaurants, bowling alleys, suburban motor lodges, my investment portfolio, my liquid assets, my frozen assets, the numbered overseas accounts, the gold coins and jewels secreted in various safety deposit vaults all across the country, and how everything was riding on the success of this movie—and I felt frightened. I remembered the days when I was a mere script reader and often found myself at the mercy of stupid superiors, *inferior* superiors, and how easy it is to be broken in such situations, how much self-determination and will it took to stay strong, to maintain my own vision, and how now it was *my* task to stay receptive to anyone around me who, though my inferior, might well indeed be my superior, and how I mustn't destroy such a person but help him. And often had my wife

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professed that she recognized me in the strong-willed protagonists of my movies, be they gangsters or renegade soldiers or just a young boy coming of age, yes, my wife saw me, her husband, in my movies, she detected a vestige of personal flavor, of an intensely private sensibility, in those huge, impersonal, expensive, commercial blockbusters that I'd directed. If my gangster looked a police officer straight in the eye, *expressionlessly* in the eye, then my wife would claim that that was exactly how I went about intimidating her, not to mention the various studio executives I was always bullying into signing over more checks whenever I went over budget.

There is no peace for me anymore. And sometimes I think it would be so nice just to be a quiet, inconspicuous nobody, some anonymous editing technician with no ambition or drive; but of course it is far too late for that. Yet other times I think that nothing would make sounder investment sense than to purchase some small tropical nation on the verge of bankruptcy and simply transform the whole country into one enormous studio, a gigantic soundstage with video cameras all over the place—atop mountains, in trees, rotating in the middle of the desert to capture the vulture as it roosts in the cactus—ready to capture *everything*, night and day, with all the rain forests wired for sound, *the incessant melancholy patter of the rain*, and with tall transmitting towers set up on the country's highest mountains so that I could then beam, by way of my own privately owned—*nationally* owned—series of telecommunications satellites, the ongoing movie, the ongoing *story*, of this country, *my* country, to the rest of the world outfitted with its own series of satellite dishes—imagine!—the movie of a country's life—I couldn't sleep. I was all excited. I got up and paced the room. I checked to see that the Band-Aid was still in place over the keyhole to the adjoining bedroom. I tiptoed up to the hall door and—flung it open. No one. It was four in the morning. I decided to telephone my wife. Sleepily she got on the line, but I was pleased to note that despite the hour she did not sound annoyed. I told her that I had finished the film, no, I hadn't quite finished it, one cut was still troubling me, but that I was looking forward to the weekend-long party, that after

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being cooped up in the editing room for so long I was looking forward to sleeping outdoors in the pine forest beneath the starry skies, and that I hoped all my guests, all five hundred of them, would bring their sleeping bags too as suggested on the invitations and camp out in the woods instead of putting up in nearby motor lodges or at friends' cabins in the area, and my wife said she and our children were looking forward to sleeping outdoors too. Then I mentioned that some one-eyed cretin was staying at the house, a young documentary filmmaker, and my wife, my darling wife, who loves movies and knows nothing about them, asked me how in the world the young man could make movies if one of his eyes was dead, so I explained to the simple, dim dear that that might well be to the young man's advantage, that he sees the whole world as though through a camera lens, which is to say, flattened out, with less depth perspective, that the way we see images on the screen is how he sees everyday life, *that with him life itself is nothing but a vast movie perspective*, the whole world not a stage but a screen, and my wife said, "Oh, that's nice," and that was the end of that dismal exchange. I said goodbye and hung up more anxious and depressed than before.

I climbed back into bed. I burrowed back down under the blankets. But I couldn't get that one execrable cut out of my mind. I remembered an old silent gangster movie that contained a cut that suggested a solution to my problem—from a shot of a cormorant flying over the sea at dawn, to a shot of the gangster staring out his seaside bungalow window—and though I had this film in my private archives downstairs I hadn't looked at it in ages. So I decided I'd run it in the screening room before anyone else was up. Outside, the sky was just beginning to grow light. There would be time enough before people started drifting down for breakfast.

But after making a pot of coffee in the kitchen and taking it downstairs, I found—*him*!—the one-eyed cretin at the foot of my basement stairs gazing with his *one damned eye* at the framed photostat of my first check from a major studio for over a million dollars, right there on the wall, next to my fire engine red antique soda machine, which appeared briefly in my second

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film. He was scrutinizing the check with obvious bewilderment, no doubt trying to figure out if it was the real thing, and if so how I could stand not cashing it; and I have to admit, judging from the expression on his face it wasn't even envy or professional curiosity but simple unadorned metaphysical bewilderment—but then he heard me padding down the carpeted stairs and looked up—*with that one damned eye*!—obviously startled and embarrassed, and he muttered, "Good morning," and I just nodded, and he proceeded to slink away, but then suddenly swung around and asked if there was a bathroom downstairs, "Yes," I said, "*but there are no towels on the rack*," and he said, "Oh," and stumbled off—

I set up the film.

I ran it.

But I couldn't see anything in perspective; for ninety minutes I sat there dazed, the images racing before me, I wanted to create images that didn't yet exist—and I couldn't even look at the ones in front of me. Finally I shut the projector off and went upstairs for breakfast; but, yes, *he was there*, sitting at my dining room table, sipping orange juice freshly squeezed by my maid, reading the morning edition of my newspaper, which he had roughly folded back to the comics. He glanced up and barely nodded, and I barely nodded back, and then he turned the page to *the racing results*. I wondered if he was calling his bookie back East on my telephone.

The maid brought me a fresh cup of coffee and I sat there sipping it, staring out at the sunlight dancing on the water in my backyard pool; I felt confused, I didn't know what to do; he was reading *my* paper; finally he looked up and asked if I would like the news section; I shook my head no, of course I didn't want it, if I wanted it I would just come right out and say so; after all, it was *my* paper; but then someone else—a young woman—my lieutenant's newest girlfriend, joined us and started chatting with me; she completely ignored him, and soon he put down the paper and began sniffing for an opening in the conversation, an entranceway into our little chat, a place where he could rend it apart and enter, triumphantly—but I left no such place, I kept up a steady patter of small talk about

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people who were friends of both me and my lieutenant, people whom *he* couldn't possibly know.

Finally he said to me, slowly and reticently, "You know, I've been your house guest for close to a week now and I'm not even sure you know who I am or what I'm doing here." I remained impassive. "In fact," he went on, "I'm not even sure you know I've made a film." I turned and looked straight at him, straight at that *one damned eye*, and then I spoke softly, reassuringly, though without smiling. "I know you've made a film. I know who you are." I paused and waited for him to fill the pause, to say, "Do you plan to look at it?" or, "I'd appreciate it if you looked at it," or, "I'd be indebted to you for life if you looked at it," but he said no such thing, he didn't say anything, he just let the pause hang there, yawning, gaping, *spreading*— "And," I added, "I plan to look at it as soon as possible." Which wasn't true. One way or the other didn't seem to matter to him though. He just nodded, a bit puzzled, he wasn't completely satisfied or reassured by my answer, but he took it as the end of the matter, and so resumed reading the paper, *my* paper, roughly folded back to the racing results. "Who were you calling this morning?" He looked up, startled, as if he hadn't heard me correctly. "Huh?" "I heard you on the telephone. You dialed ten numbers—long distance. Where to? The other side of the continent?" "If I make any long distance calls," he said carefully, "which I haven't, I have every intention of paying you back." Whereupon he resumed reading the paper, *my* paper, with an air of wounded pride!

I needed fresh air, *immediately*, so I rose, excused myself, and went out for a walk. I walked around the block. I strolled leisurely around the block. I paced the pavement around the block. But no sooner had I rounded the block for the third time than I saw coming my way the wife of the local newspaper's scandalmonger, *that bilgebag*; she is a petite, attractive woman in her late forties, and she talks too much, way too much, and too much of what she says is gibberish, and I cannot stand, I cannot stand, her husband, that pest. Once I even sent an inner-office memo around expressly forbidding any employee to talk to him or her, and sure enough the memo turned up

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the next day in his column, while his wife protested to mutual acquaintances of ours that she had nothing to do with it, which I didn't believe for one minute, still don't; but at least I have the satisfaction of not inviting our so-called society columnist, that minor irritant, that insufferable bilgebag, to the best parties, the best "social events," in town, *my* parties, and what's more he and his wife can see the lights of my mansion through the swaying tree tops outside the second floor bedroom window of their *smaller* mansion which is set slightly *lower* on the hill; and if the wind is blowing in the right direction, if the wind is blowing from the north-east to the south-west, then the merry laughter and music from *my* party should carry right into *their* second floor bedroom, as they're tossing, and turning, and yanking their pillows over their ears—

But now here she was, that gossip columnist's wife, coming straight toward me, not *straight* toward me, no, she was on the inner part of the pavement, and I wasn't sure what to do, in fact I was about to turn around and head back, or else cross to the other leafy side of the leafy street, but it may already have been too late, I think she'd spotted me and was hoping I'd say hello, or even just nod brusquely; actually she wishes that me and her husband would make amends so she could start attending these parties that so disturb her sleep—

Suddenly it came to me—in a flash! It was so simple I nearly laughed out loud; but I didn't; instead—here's what I did—instead of steering away from her I steered straight *towards* her, that is correct, I made a beeline directly towards her, I *aimed* myself at her, yes, and even as I was doing so I could see her eyes widen in momentary disarray, in surprise, in *disbelief*; nor did I smile, I didn't even look at her, in fact even while I was steering straight towards her I was pretending not to notice her; I was *actively* ignoring her, ignoring her existence, *canceling out* her existence—

And then—*bump*. I knocked my shoulder into her shoulder, not hard enough to knock her down or anything, after all I am a large man and she is a slight, diminutive lady, no, I didn't send her sprawling to the pavement or anything like that—but I did bump her hard enough to knock her off course, to upset

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her own delicate gyroscope, to *startle* her, to make her wonder if this signaled some new, nasty escalation of hostilities, to give her something to *think about*—

And let me tell you a secret. I had my trusted lieutenant check the "society" column the next day and no item appeared about a *nationally known* film director rudely bumping into *local* columnist's wife on the street, nor did any righteously angry husband come banging his fist on the door of my more stately mansion, yes indeed, *for I am bigger and younger and stronger*, call it physical intimidation if you like, call it terrorization—and that's the long and the short of it.

Now I felt better. Now I felt ready to tackle that troublesome cut. I did *not* feel ready to face that moronic director with his one damned eye. So without even bothering to report back to the house I got in my car and began driving across town to my editing room. I would do it alone. *I have always been doing it alone.* It was a beautiful day and I noticed nothing. And while it may well be true that I'm an extraordinary salesman, that I know how to talk up a storm of enthusiasm, that I radiate and infect others with my self-confidence and vitality, that I've counseled and sponsored and bankrolled and produced the most promising young directors of my generation, it's equally true that there've been times when I've been short of friends and low on funds, when I've had to mortgage everything in sight including the lawn in front of my house—the autumnal lawn with my son's blue tricycle lying overturned on it, one rear wheel still sentimentally turning—and if later I could buy everything back, even buy into the banks I had been mortgaged to—well, what of it? The truth is, I care nothing for worldly goods, nothing for security, *I don't need it.* If I have only a dime left in my pocket, I'm still not in anyone else's pocket. The idiots who envy me my "opportunities" think that it is a simple question of rubbing my hands together and shouting, "Okay gang! Time to make another movie, another blockbuster!" But it's sheer idealism, sheer *madness*, to believe that you're going to get exactly what you want out of your camera men, your sound recorders, your editors, actors, set designers, art directors, wardrobe supervisors, *animal trainers*! for all of them are used

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to doing things in their own way, *in the old rut*, and if you're to do anything at all new you must break their habits, destroy their *wills*, you have to write the new laws yourself. Because to place one image after another, to lay one sound over another, is the most terrifying project in the world, is fraught with hidden dangers at every step of the way, is the most maddeningly *rational* poetic enterprise imaginable. I shape the movie and the movie shapes me. And afterwards it is very hard for me to leave the shelter of the editing room and assume my upright position among other vertical human beings, to recover my tremulous sense of self, or even a small sense of self.

I parked in front of the building, unlocked the door, and descended the stairs to my editing room. *I got right down to work.* I worked for hours on end, I reviewed outtakes, put the image of the gull flying over the lake *before* the image of my protagonist staring out the window, I put it after, I faded out the *caw caw caw* of the gull, I heightened it, I superimposed the *caw caw caw* over my protagonist staring out the dusk window, I arranged a whole new sequence of the shots, I rearranged them, I *deranged* them, for hours and hours I worked in a mad frenzy, cutting, taping, fiddling with the dials, I tossed in the sounds of ocean waves crashing with a roar along the rocky coast even though this was a placid, inland lake, I subtracted them, I tossed in flashback shots of a young boy splashing happily at a lake shore—outtakes from a sun tan lotion commercial I'd directed as a young man—I subtracted them, I worked relentlessly, throwing myself completely into it, stepping back from it as far as possible—

And finally—toward the end of the day—I arrived at what I wanted, at the exact confluence of sounds and images that I *needed*, and to be perfectly frank *it was precisely what I had started out with*, but do not laugh, do not snicker, for in truth it wasn't what I had started out with, for by working so long and so hard at it, by pressing myself so relentlessly, by arriving at the same thing through so intensely a concentrated ten-hour work stint, I had arrived at something *new*, something better, something different, something *more assured*, yes, I had arrived at *the same thing* but by virtue of the new burst of work,

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the new meditations, the new elucidations, the new arranging and rearranging and deranging, by virtue of all of this the same thing was, quid pro quo and tit for tat, *something different*!

The door broke open. My lieutenant burst into the room. He looked at me in horror, then without a word hustled me into my jacket and up the stairs and into my car so that we could get to the party—we were already late—celebrating the completion of the film I was busy completing. It had slipped my mind!

We arrived just after sunset. The party was well under way. The sign I had requested had been posted at the gateway to my estate: *Your presence on these grounds implies consent to appear in a film being made of this party*. No one wins a lawsuit besides lawyers. My second unit director would be filming the whole event for my private archives—call it a documentary, call it a home movie, call it what you will, I have an aversion to categories. It was a cool summer night and hundreds of people strolled at their pleasure over the gently rolling wooded hills; in the clearings campfires had been built and beer kegs and wine jugs set up on the tables, while in the large central clearing, over the open barbecue pit, sausages were bursting their skins and enormous kettles of beans were simmering. I had hired some country-and-western musicians and they roamed from clearing to clearing playing their songs like wandering minstrels of old; actually I am sure they were like no such thing; I despise their crooning but my lieutenant had recommended them, they had just crooned a few songs for a friend's forthcoming movie that was already all the talk of the industry.

I detached myself from my lieutenant and drifted around on my own. Friends, guests, employees smiled shyly at me. Yet no one approached me. *No one approached me.* Not one script reader from my story department wishing to advance to script writer approached me with a first draft for a film that would put the company back on its feet; not one film editor wishing to advance to film director approached me with an idea for a movie that would break all box office records and win critical acclaim to boot. No. They knew I was exhausted and anyway,

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I intimidate them. So I wandered through the woods from one campfire to the next, from one knot of people to the next—*and I felt lonely.* I would approach the campfire through the dark quiet of the woods, see the people gathered around it, hear their voices and their laughter borne aloft on the gentle night breeze, and then as soon as I stepped out of the woods, as soon as I stepped into the light of the fire and smiled—well, they would smile back but a bit timidly, and then fall silent or continue to talk but in more subdued tones—*and I felt lonely.*

I wandered forlornly through the woods. I passed someone's tent pitched on a bluff overlooking a creek. I stumbled over a pair of sleeping bags spread on a poncho on a bed of dry pine needles. Contrary to rumors my woods are not wired for sound. Then as I approached another clearing I espied my second unit director, that imbecile, shooting some thoroughly mediocre footage, standard stuff, of the country-and-western singers backlit by the fire. I remained hidden at the edge of the woods. Some wonderful horseplay was going on at the other side of the campfire—a young woman whom I didn't recognize had taken a long string of linked sausages and in a delightful pantomime of a pedantic boy-scout master was demonstrating overhand knots and timber hitches with them—but do you think my second unit director picked up on this? Of course not, all he could see were those crooning cowboys, those philharmonic wranglers—and that is why he will always be second-unit.

I continued through the woods. At the next clearing I spotted a young woman whom the gossip columnist, that bilgebag, had recently reported I was dating—and she saw me and smiled shyly, and I smiled shyly back. I noticed she was talking with someone who stood just in the shadows at the edge of the clearing, I couldn't make out who it was, but he appeared to be tall, yet swaybacked, no, *hunchbacked*, he had incredibly poor posture, there was something about him, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it, I couldn't quite place this . . . unsymmetrical . . . misshapen . . . ill-proportioned . . . grotesquely deformed . . . *twisted one-eyed cretin*—horrified I fled back into the woods.

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I continued to wander forlornly. Then just as I arrived at the edge of the next clearing a long black limousine bounced up the dirt road and stopped right in front of the campfire. The chauffeur opened the door and from it stepped the blonde female lead of my new movie—I was sick of looking at her—in tight-fitting blue jeans and a gray silk blouse; and from my spot in the woods, from my *hiding place*, I overheard another woman, an old friend, say to her companion, "Leave it to that idiot to show up in a rented limo." And I might have written this remark off to the average woman's petty jealousy of a starlet—except this woman was the head of my story department, an articulate woman, an intelligent woman, an educated and cultivated woman, exquisitely beautiful in her own right, and I knew that she was speaking the truth—*and I felt lonely*. I drifted away before anyone discovered me, before the actress came over fishing around for my opinion of her in the final cut (not secure enough to feign indifference, not famous enough yet to ask me outright, though the movie would fix that).

I drifted away. I plunged into the woods, far from the voices and laughter of the campfires. Soon, the party had faded to the merest background murmur, indistinguishable from the soft murmur of a creek whose stony bank I had arrived on. For a long time I simply stood there, admiring a stand of tall dark pines on the opposite bank silhouetted against the night sky. Then—I heard a cricket. It did not sound right. Its chirp was too soft. I looked at the creek, at the silhouetted pines, the pebbles of the creek bed, farther back the rounded hills, higher up and to my right the moon; it was as coherent a picture of nature as one could ever hope for—but that damn cricket chirp was too low, it threw everything else out of kilter; I stepped closer to the clump of bushes from which the chirp seemed to be emanating so that it would sound louder—but in doing so the creek slipped behind a boulder, the rounded hills disappeared behind the silhouetted pines, the moon vanished behind a larger hill—yet it was absolutely essential to see the moonlight shimmering on the waters, and the rounded hills off to the left of the silhouetted pines, and the moon, all at the same

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time that I was hearing that damn chirp, otherwise the woods got boring, the starry sky turned commonplace, the whole sum total panorama of nocturnal nature would be all shot to hell. I stepped to my left. That adjusted the cricket chirp to the right level, and the moon even slipped back out, but the rounded hills and the creek continued to elude me. I took two steps backwards and the creek jumped back out but now the moon slipped behind the hill again. I stepped forward—moon, no creek—backwards—creek, no moon—three steps sideways—moon, creek, but no silhouetted pines—turned to my right—hill eclipsed moon—farther to my left—pines eclipsed hills—sideways again, backwards again, a giant step forward, a giant step backwards, *moon, creek, hills, pines*—

"Daddy, are you all right?"

I looked blankly at my youngest boy, then patted him on the head, smiled paternally, and allowed him to take my hand and lead me through the woods to our campsite. My wife was already there, tucking our other children into their bright blue and orange sleeping bags. She looked up and smiled wearily, and I smiled back. I had been afraid that at the last moment she'd make a big production, insist on sleeping in the manor; but she didn't, she just smiled wearily, acceptingly—and I was grateful.

The next morning I was up at dawn. I was one of the first people up. I could have used another twenty hours sleep but legend has it I am bounding with energy—so bound out of the sleeping bag I must. In the main clearing coffee makers had been set up on the tables, along with platters of rolls and muffins, and boxes of oranges and apples. A few people were already drifting in, and my lieutenant had revived the campfire. It was chilly and people sat around the fire on logs and stumps, warming their hands around their coffee cups. I wandered about. I sniffed the piney air. From a clear bubbling brook I splashed water on my face. Then as I knelt on the bank drying my head with my towel, through the wet tangles of my hair I saw *him*. That damned documentary director with his *one damned eye*

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was standing off on the edge of the woods chatting with the head of my story department and her boyfriend. Still rubbing my wet hair furiously with my towel, I went right over and wished her and her boyfriend good morning, studiously ignoring *him*, canceling out *his existence*. I asked her if they'd slept in the woods, and she laughed and said no, they'd slept in the camper on account of her boyfriend's bad back—she slapped him jovially on his bad back—but I felt sad, even my old trusted friend, the head of my story department, hadn't bothered to sleep in the woods, hadn't really gotten into *the spirit of the thing*. To be frank, I felt a bit irritated, a trifle peevish, I began wondering how many other people had sneaked off to motor lodges and friends' weekend cabins. Then I turned to that damned documentary director; I just looked at him and he just looked at me *with his one damned eye!* and I figured he'd slept in the woods, he'd slept in a motel, he'd sneaked back to the city and slept in *my* bed, to tell the truth I didn't want to know where he'd slept; but then he rubbed his good eye, as though to get the sleep out of it, and said, offered, volunteered, *thrust forcibly upon me*, the unsolicited information that he hadn't slept anywhere, quite the contrary! he'd been up all night troubled by a cut in the documentary he was currently completing; it was a cut from a shot of a giant chicken squawking in pain, to a shot of the teenage scientist gazing sadly though the bars of his bird's cage, or maybe it should be vice-versa, or maybe the squawking should be played over the close-up of the teenager's mournful face, or—anyway, unable to sleep he'd wandered along the creek that winds through my estate, had in fact followed it *off* of my estate (which wasn't as big as he'd originally thought, he added) for miles and miles in the dark, and at one point had startled a paunchy raccoon pawing through the creek for fish, *why in the world was he telling me this drivel?* I said goodbye and stalked off.

I drifted over to the campfire and sat on a log, facing a group that had grown to a dozen or more. A few people smiled sleepily and nodded hello, but I was beginning to feel depressed; but just then the beautiful young actress came over, still wearing

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her tightfitting blue jeans and her gray silk blouse—not a wrinkle or a crease in the blouse, she hadn't slept on a bed of pine needles!—and she was carrying a Kodak pocket camera and she smiled, and I smiled back, then she grinned, said "Cheese!" and snapped my picture. Whereupon I reached for her camera which she flirtatiously surrendered, expecting me to snap *her* picture—she went instantly professional with the mock-sexy pose and smile—but instead I cupped my hands around the camera like it was a harmonica, brought it up to my lips, and pretended to start playing it; and everyone around the campfire laughed genuinely, and I began to feel better. Then I held up the junky automatic for everyone to see and said, "Here we have it, folks. State-of-the-art for the early eighties," and again everyone around the fire laughed nicely. Upon which the actress, still laughing (she'd recovered capitally from her unphotographed pose), installed herself in my lap; and immediately, without even thinking about it, I began working invisible marionette strings, pretending to move her arms and legs this way and that, and right away her arms and legs began to move floppily *this way and that*, as if hinged like a puppet's—she was acting quite nicely, better than she had in the movie, more spontaneously—and again everyone laughed. But then I noticed, standing on the edge of the growing crowd, my dear wife, her arms crossed, smiling grimly. "Darling," I yelled grinning, "this beautiful young actress isn't really sitting on my lap. We're really discussing photography," and all at once *the spell was broken*, everyone around the fire suddenly looked confused, a bit embarrassed, as if some country bumpkin, *me*, had deviated from the script; and even more suddenly I had an idea; *I would remove the actress from my lap, jump to my feet, and rubbing my hands together, yell, "Okay early birds, let's see if there're enough of us to get some volleyball going!"* but then I noticed, on the other side of the crowd, that damned documentary director studying me with his one damned eye, and right behind him with the video camera, *shooting blithely over his shoulder*, was my second unit director, that oaf, cheerfully shooting away, oblivious to everything; and *he* looked at me scornfully, with

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a look of contempt, of deep repugnance, of vast ontological disgust—

And just then I noticed the sun rising over the soft green hills, and I filled my lungs with the resinous scent of the dewy firs, so tall and so motionless in the cool dawn light, and far away a cricket chirped, and even farther away a creek was murmuring, and I faltered—

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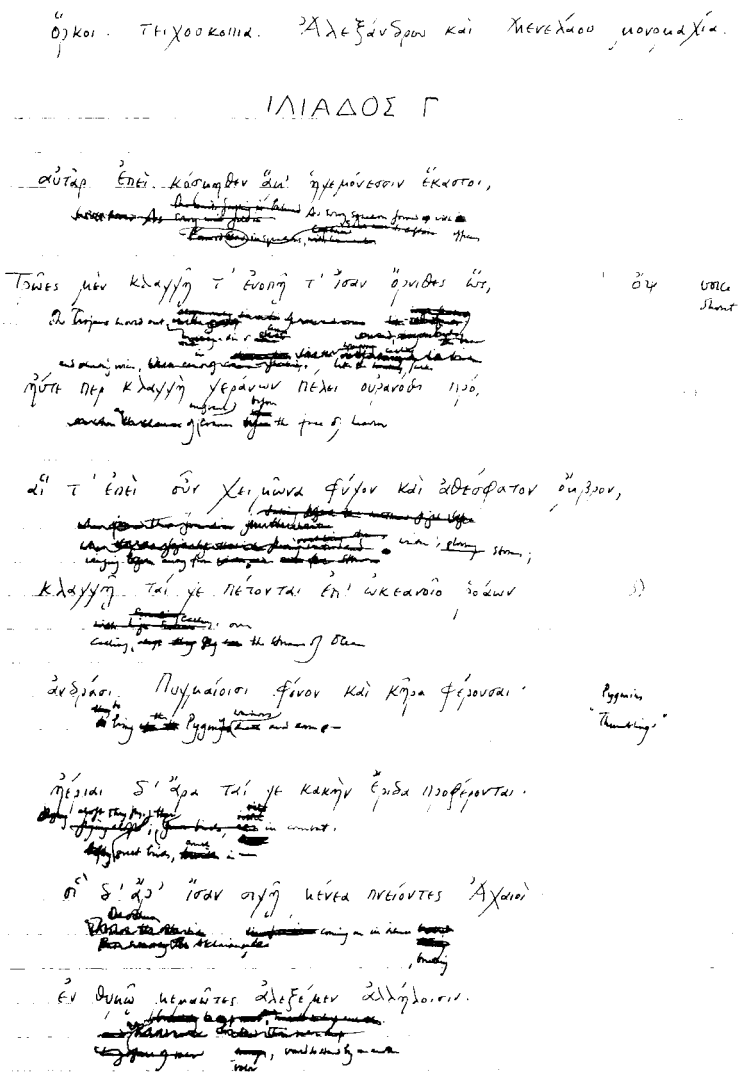

Robert Fitzgerald's worksheet for his translation of the opening of the Third Book of the Iliad.

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The Art of Translation I
Robert Fitzgerald

Robert Fitzgerald was born in 1910 and grew up in Springfield, Illinois. He attended Harvard College, and graduated in 1933. Fitzgerald is renowned for his translations of Homer's Iliad *and* Odyssey, *and most recently Virgil's* Aeneid. *He is also the author of three books of poems, collected in 1971 in* Spring Shade *(New Directions). While he was an undergraduate at Harvard, Fitzgerald made the acquaintance of James Agee, whose collected poems and short prose he edited after Agee's death in 1955.*

Fitzgerald met us in his office in Harvard's Pusey Library one

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morning in August, 1983. From 1965–1981, Fitzgerald was the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard. The day we met was muggy; Fitzgerald was wearing a blue seersucker suit and a sport shirt. He carried a worn bookbag over his shoulder, announcing, "I've brought some exhibits!"

Pusey Library is a new building and Fitzgerald's office is a small, durably-carpeted room, somewhat longer than it is wide. A bookshelf hangs over a desk. In the room there's just enough space for an easy chair and a straight chair. Standing at the door, we could see out a narrow window at the opposite end of the room onto a courtyard, where grass and a few thin trees are trying to grow. Fitzgerald shook an old, pocket-sized copy of Virgil out of his bag onto his desk. We sat down, and the interview began.

Fitzgerald speaks slowly and very deliberately. When he finds a quotation or phrase or word that seems particularly telling, he marks the occasion with a small click of the tongue. We talked for about an hour and a half, and then went to lunch.

INTERVIEWER

First, we thought we'd ask you what made you want to be a writer?

ROBERT FITZGERALD

I don't think it comes on that way . . . wanting to be a writer. You find yourself at a certain point making something in writing, and this seems to be great fun. I guess in high school—this was in Springfield, Illinois—I discovered that I could put words together and the results were pleasing to me. After I had discovered the charms of verse, I wrote verse all the time. Then when I was a senior, a great, kinetic teacher named Elizabeth Graham conducted something called the Scribbler's Club for a few seniors. It was a class, but it called itself a club, and was engaged in writing throughout the year. They put out a little magazine. I guess that was when the whole thing came to a head. I wrote a lot of verse and prose. So it wasn't so much

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wanting to be a writer as having a knack or fondness for putting things into verse.

INTERVIEWER

Were there any writers whose work you particularly admired at that time?

FITZGERALD

Well, I was greatly taken by a story called "Fifty Grand" in *Scribner's Magazine*, which came into the Scribbler's Club. I thought it was really wonderful. That was Ernest Hemingway's story about the boxer who's offered $50,000 to throw a fight and, though double-crossed and fouled, still goes on to throw it. It's a faultless story. I was also greatly taken at that time by Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. And in verse, well, you know, you come across the work of William Butler Yeats at a certain point and your head endures fraction.

INTERVIEWER

Where did you go when you left Springfield?

FITZGERALD

I went to the Choate School in Wallingford, Connecticut. When I got out of high school in Springfield, Illinois in 1928, I had applied for and had been admitted to Yale. My family felt that since I was only seventeen, it would be a little premature to put me in college. So, I went to Choate for a year. While at Choate, I met Dudley Fitts, who was one of the masters there. He had been at Harvard, and I got the idea that where Fitts had gone to college was the place for me to go.

INTERVIEWER

What sort of influence did Fitts have on you?

FITZGERALD

He encouraged me to learn Greek. I would never have gone in for it unless he had dropped the word that it was nice to

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know a little Greek. So when I got to Harvard, I enrolled in a beginning course. And Fitts was up on Pound and Eliot and Joyce. He read me *The Waste Land*, which changed my life.

INTERVIEWER

Your early poems are full of dislocated, unidentified speakers, images of night and darkness, glinting lights. What drew you to such imagery?

FITZGERALD

I think that the life of the undergraduate, now and certainly in those days, was nocturnal, quite a lot of it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still feel close to those poems?

FITZGERALD

I recognize them as my own and I don't disown them or feel silly about them. I think some of them are still pretty good, for what they are. I wouldn't have put them in my collection [*Spring Shade*] unless I thought they were worth including.

INTERVIEWER

One of your poems, "Portraits," is a portrait of John Wheelwright. How did you get to know him?

FITZGERALD

It must have been Fitts who introduced me to Wheelwright, and also to Sherry Mangan, a very spectacular literary figure. Both of these gents were socialists and political thinkers. Eventually, Sherry Mangan, whose early poetry was highly stylized and affected, settled into a life of dedication to the Trotskyite cause: socialism without the horrors of Stalinism. Wheelwright, too, was of this persuasion. Well, you probably know something of Wheelwright's place among the eccentrics of Boston of his time. He was always in his great big raccoon-skin coat and he belonged to the best Boston society of the time. Yet after an

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evening with friends, wherever the Brahmins of the time congregated, he would go out and do a soapbox turn on the Common, lecturing the cause of socialism in his tux and so on. He was also a devout Anglo-Catholic. These figures, along with B. F. Skinner, who was the white-haired boy of psychology around here at that time, and a physicist named Cuthbert Daniel, were all intellectuals of considerable—what?—presence and audacity and interest. None of them had any money and at that time—this was '32, '33—this country had already felt the very cold grip of the Depression. The mystery of what in the world was going on to deprive people of jobs and prospects, and of what was the matter with American society, occupied these guys constantly. I remember that my senior year I went in to see my tutor and I found this man, a tutor in English, reading *Das Kapital.* When I noticed it, he said, "Yes. I don't intend to spend my life taking care of a sick cat"—by which he meant capitalist society.

INTERVIEWER

Were you sympathetic to revolutionary causes too?

FITZGERALD

Not very, although I had to realize that something was going on. It had been taken for granted in my family that I would go to law school after college. It turned out that the wherewithal to go to law school had vanished, so I had to go to work. I went to work on a New York newspaper, *The Herald Tribune.* But I could never get passionate about revolution, at that time or later—it was a passion that was denied me.

INTERVIEWER

So that when, in the poem about Wheelwright, you speak of "the class machine" . . .

FITZGERALD

I've forgotten.

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INTERVIEWER

It goes:

But [he] saw the heads of death that rode
Within each scoundrel's limousine,
Grinning at hunger on the road
To incorporate the class machine;

FITZGERALD

Those were images drawn from Wheelwright's own work and his way of looking at things.

INTERVIEWER

Do you admire his work?

FITZGERALD

Well, up to a point. I think it extremely peculiar and difficult and always did. The fantasy can be wonderful, figuring "some unworldly sense." Lately, there's been a little fashion of taking it up. John Ashbery, for example, thinks highly of it. A lot of it simply baffles me and I'd rather not get into it.

INTERVIEWER

Another early poem of yours, "Counselors," is about someone who considers resorting to various professionals for advice, experts in this and that, but decides that on the whole it wouldn't be worth his while. Did you think of Vachel Lindsay, or T. S. Eliot, or Yvor Winters, perhaps, as true counselors?

FITZGERALD

I thought that Vachel was a really great fellow, *molto simpatico*, and very good to me. I wrote about him, by the way, in a recent issue of *Poetry*. And later, Winters always seemed to me, crotchety as he was, to have applied himself with great independence and great purity to the literary business. When I was working at *Time*, in New York, I suppose I held him as an exemplar of serious application to the problems of poetry and literature. I remember in June, 1940, I was sitting in my office when the office boy came in with the afternoon paper, which was the old *World-Telegram*, and threw it down on the desk. The front page consisted of nothing but one large pho-

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tograph of the Arc de Triomphe, with German troops marching through it down the Champs Elysées. The headline was: *Ici Repose un Soldat Français Mort pour la Patrie.* That was all. Think of a New York newspaper doing that! That's when I knew that in a year or so we'd be in that affair. There was no question. So, I walked into the managing editor's office and said, "I resign." I'd saved up enough money to live on for a year and I thought I'd do what I could with my own writing until I got swept up in what I knew was coming. They very kindly turned my resignation into a year's leave of absence. I thought, "Now's the time to see Winters." I went to Palo Alto, got a room in a hotel, and called on him. Winters was very kind. He suggested I go to Santa Fe if I were going to make my effort. So, eventually, I'd say in September or October, I found myself, and my then-wife, in Santa Fe, working at poetry, working at Greek—I translated *Oedipus at Colonus*—and spending the year as best I could.

INTERVIEWER

What was your experience of the war?

FITZGERALD

It was very mild. I was in the Navy, and I worked at a shore station in New York. Late in '44, I was assigned to CINCPAC—the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean—at Pearl Harbor, and when that command moved to the Marianas, to Guam, I went along on staff, to do various menial jobs. From, say, February to October of that year, I had nothing to do when I was off-duty but to read. I took three books in my footlocker. One was the Oxford text of the works of Virgil, one was the *Vulgate New Testament*, and the other was a Latin dictionary. I went through Virgil from stem to stern. That's when I first really read the *Aeneid*. I never took a course on Virgil in college or anything like that. I think that's of some interest . . . that with reference to my eventually doing the translation, my first real exposure to the *Aeneid* was hand to hand, with nothing but a dictionary—no instructor, no scholarship, nothing but the text itself, and the choice, evening after evening, of doing that or going to the Officers' Club and getting smashed.

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INTERVIEWER

In your memoir of James Agee [which appears as the introduction to Agee's collected short prose], you speak of how difficult it was to write during the thirties and forties; you seem to mean that it was not only financially difficult to get by as a writer, but also that it was hard to know what to write. Was that so?

FITZGERALD

Well, let's take my first job on the *Herald Tribune.* There was no newspaper guild, no union. It was a six-day work week. For a good part of that year and a half I was coming in, as everybody did, at one-thirty, two o'clock in the afternoon, to pick up assignments—you'd get two or three. Then off you'd go on the subway, up and down the town. From two to six you'd gather the dope. You'd come in around six and knock off, if you could, two or three of these stories. These would be small stories and the result would be a couple of paragraphs each, if anything. Then you'd go to the automat, let's say, and eat something, and then you'd come back and get more assignments. You'd be through, with luck, around midnight. It would be a ten-hour day, and you'd have six of these in a row. I can promise you that on your seventh day, what you did, if you could manage it, was to stay in bed. I can remember literally not being able to move with sheer fatigue. How then were you going to arrange to turn out three hundred Spenserian stanzas per year? What added to the difficulty, for me, was that I do not and never could write fast. God knows how I got through it. I really don't. There was the same problem at *Time*, with the additional element that you had to be pretty clever. A *Time* story had to have a good deal of finish, in its way.

INTERVIEWER

Agee and you once planned a magazine. What was it to be like?

FITZGERALD

I have his letters but I didn't keep copies of mine, so I don't know what I was proposing. Anyway, it was to be the perfect magazine.

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INTERVIEWER

How did you meet T. S. Eliot?

FITZGERALD

I got to know him earlier, when I was in England in '31-'32. Vachel had written to him, and he wrote me at Cambridge to invite me, saying, "Do drop in." You know, at Faber and Faber. I did. I went to see him and we talked about Cambridge, where I was working in philosophy. He was familiar with the people at Cambridge who were then my teachers or lecturers, C. D. Broad and G. E. Moore. This, of course, was a continuing interest in his life. He had, after all, done his dissertation on Bradley. Had he gone on in that direction, he was going to be a philosopher in the philosophy department here at Harvard. I think on the second or third of my visits I had the courage to hand him a poem. He looked at the poem for a long time. Great silence. He studied it, then he looked up and said, "Is this the best you can do?" *Whoo!* Quite a thing to say! I didn't realize then what I realized later—that it was an editor's question: "Shall I publish this or shall I wait until he does something that shows more confidence?" What I thought at the time, and there was also this about it, was that it was fraternal. Just talking to me as one craftsman to another. A compliment, really.

INTERVIEWER

You've said that *The Waste Land* shook your foundations, and that *Ash Wednesday* always seemed to you something that was beyond literature. How so? Particularly *Ash Wednesday.*

FITZGERALD

Well, the music is unearthly—some of it. It seemed that way to me then, and it still does. And the audacity! "Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree." *Whoo!* Who is the lady? Whose is the juniper tree? What are the leopards doing there? All these questions were completely subordinate to the audacity of the image—and in what would be called a very religious poem. It needs to be said of Eliot that although in the end the whole corpus has settled in peoples' minds as a work

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that comes to its climax with the *Four Quartets*, and is definitely religious (Pound in his kidding way referred to him as the "Reverend" Eliot), that the genius was *a fury, a real fury!* Only a fury could have broken the molds of English poetry in those ways at that time. That's what excited us all. *The Waste Land* was a dramatic experience too. It's very hard, in a few words, to get across the particular kind of excitement, but people ought to realize that at its height this gift was the gift of a Fury—capital *F.*

INTERVIEWER

What led you to translate Homer?

FITZGERALD

Now we come to, say, 1950, '51, '52. We were living in Connecticut and having a baby every year, and I was frantically teaching wherever I could, whatever I could, in order to keep everything going. It occurred to me one day—I was teaching at Sarah Lawrence at the time—driving from Ridgefield, Connecticut to Bronxville, that the best place to get help with the household and the children was overseas. And how could I manage to get abroad? Well, at this time, in the colleges and universities, humanities courses were being developed, and everyone agreed that a good verse translation of the *Odyssey* was something they would love to have. There weren't any. Lattimore had done the *Iliad*, published, I think, in '51. I had reviewed it, admiring it very much. I wrote to Lattimore and I said, "Do you plan to do an *Odyssey* or not?" And he wrote back and said he did not. He had other things he wanted to do. So I thought, "Why don't I try for a Guggenheim with the project of translating this poem?" I felt quite confident I could do something with Homer. Then I went to a publisher, to see if I couldn't set up a contract to do this, maybe entailing advance of a royalty. There was a very bright young man named Jason Epstein, just out of Columbia, who had invented the quality paperback (Anchor Books) at Doubleday, and had made a great killing with these things. So I ended up in the Doubleday office talking to him and, by God, he gave me a contract for

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an *Odyssey*. This was extraordinary at the time, gambling on me with this contract which assured me of three thousand dollars a year for five years while I was doing the translation. *And* I got the Guggenheim. So, Guggenheim, advance—off we went, to a part of the world where domestic help could be obtained. That's how that worked out. Just a number of favoring circumstances, a concatenation of things, combining to assure me of support, or enough support. We lived very frugally in Italy for several years—no car, no refrigerator, no radio, no telephone—everything was very simple. And so the work began and got done. It was the hand of Providence, something like that, working through these circumstances.

INTERVIEWER

You've said in the past that you came to translate Homer as a kind of amateur or free-lancer, without a full-blown academic background in classics. How did that affect your work?

FITZGERALD

It may have had some ill effects; it wouldn't have done me any harm to have been a better scholar. It wouldn't have done me any harm to have known German. During the whole nineteenth century, you know, German scholars were *it* in Homeric studies. That was a disadvantage.

INTERVIEWER

But don't you think that laboring under that disadvantage perhaps contributed to the immediacy and continuity of your contact with the text?

FITZGERALD

Right. Weighing one thing against the other, I'd rather have had that immediacy than the scholarship. A direct and constant relationship between me and the Greek—that was indispensable. Having the Greek before me and the job of matching the Greek, if I could, from day to day, hour to hour—that was what kept it alive.

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INTERVIEWER

Did you set to work with any inviolable principles of translation?

FITZGERALD

Yes, one or two. One was that it didn't matter how long it took. I'd stay with it until I got it right. The other was, roughly, that whoever had composed this poem had imagined people in action and people feeling and saying things out of what they felt; that work of imagining had to be redone. I had to reimagine it, so that it would be alive from start to finish. What had kept it fresh for so many centuries was the sensation you had, when reading it, that *this* was alive.

INTERVIEWER

What considerations went into finding an English equivalent for Homeric Greek?

FITZGERALD

Diction. One wanted the English to be, as I've already said, fully alive. That this should be so, the colloquial register of the language had to enter into it. How far should you go with colloquialism? Would slang be useful? Answer: practically never. One would avoid what was transient in speech. The test of a given phrase would be: Is it worthy to be immortal? To "make a beeline" for something. That's worthy of being immortal and is immortal in English idiom. "I guess I'll split" is not going to be immortal and is excludable, therefore excluded.

INTERVIEWER

Were there any modern English poets who gave you some insight into what kind of line to take in doing the translation?

FITZGERALD

There was, of course, Ezra Pound and his fondness for the *Odyssey*. He had helped W. H. D. Rouse. Rouse was trying to do a prose version and there was a correspondence between them. I always felt that Pound was really dissatisfied and disappointed

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in the end with what Rouse did. Before I went to Europe, I went to see Pound at St. Elizabeth's. I wanted to tell him what I was going to try to do. I told him what I felt at the time—which was that there was no point in trying to do every line. I would do what I could. I'd hit the high spots. He said, "Oh no, don't do that. Let him say everything he wanted to say." So I had to rethink it and eventually I did let Homer say everything he wanted to say. I sent Pound the first draft of the first book when I got that done in Italy that fall. I got a postcard back, a wonderful postcard, saying, "Too much iambic will kill any subject matter." After that, I was very careful about getting singsong again. Keep the verse alive, that was the main thing. That's what he meant. And then, at a certain point I came across the *Anathemata*, by David Jones, which I thought was beautiful, like a silvery piece of driftwood that you could carry around with you. I carried it around just because of the texture of parts of it, a wonderful texture. I really couldn't pinpoint or put my finger on anything in my work that was directly attributable to David Jones. It was a kind of talisman that I kept with me.

INTERVIEWER

Did you find your trip to Greece and Ithaca to be useful?

FITZGERALD

That was wonderful. It corroborated my sense of the place. There, for example, was the wine-dark sea.

INTERVIEWER

How did you work on the translations?

FITZGERALD

I had this whole routine worked out while doing the Homer. I wrote out every line of Greek in my own hand, book by book, a big notebook for each book. One line to two blank lines. As I went through the Greek and copied it out in my own hand, I would face the difficulties—any crux that turned up, questions of interpretation—and try to work them out. I accumulated editions with notes and so on as I went along. So before

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I was through, I had acquired some of the scholarship that was relevant to my problems. But always, in the end, it was simply the Greek facing me, in my own hand, in my own notebook.

INTERVIEWER

How different is it when you compose your own verse?

FITZGERALD

You don't have any lines of Greek. And you're not riding the ground swell of another imagination as you are in translating. You have your own imagination.

INTERVIEWER

Would you revise as you went along, book by book, or did you wait until it was over with?

FITZGERALD

Both. It was heavily revised before I got the typescript more or less as I wanted it. Then the routine was for me to send in to the publisher what I had done during that year and at the same time send revisions for what had been submitted the year before. Then at the end, I spent a summer going through the *whole damn thing from start to finish. Revising was interminable.*

INTERVIEWER

How long did it take altogether?

FITZGERALD

Seven years of elapsed time. I'd say six full *working* years went into this poem.

INTERVIEWER

What were the peculiar satisfactions of translation?

FITZGERALD

Well, this is exaggerating a little bit, but one could say that I eventually felt that I had him, the composer, looking over my shoulder, and that I could refer everything to him. After

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all, it was being done for his sake, and one could raise the question with him, "Will this do or won't it?" Often the answer would be no. But, when the answer was yes, when you *felt* that it was yes—that is the great satisfaction in writing. It's very precious. Writing is very difficult. It's pure hell, in fact, quite often. But when it does really click, then your little boon is at hand. So that happened sometimes.

INTERVIEWER

Your own poems seem to have fallen off since you began translating Homer.

FITZGERALD

I wonder if they did. I don't know. I think that what roughly happened with my own poems was that, indeed, I had taken on a very large job. The magnitude of that job did rather put in the shade the adventure of making a wonderful page, which is, as I would put it, the pleasure and satisfaction of making a poem: to make which really has about it something wonderful, as a good lyric poem has. On the scale of what I was trying to do, that rather faded away, and I guess I would no longer feel the complete satisfaction that in the old days had come of making a poem. I must have begun to feel that there was a slightness in comparison with the big thing. That's one way of looking at it. And then I think that when I got to Harvard and began teaching, and putting a lot into the teaching, that also took care of a certain amount of what had been taken care of in the old days by making a poem. Instead of making a poem, I was helping other people make poems, and on quite a steady basis too. I was handing it out to other people instead of keeping it. Maybe, anyway. That's possible.

INTERVIEWER

After you finished the *Iliad*, you said that you weren't going to do any more translations. What led you to take up Virgil?

FITZGERALD

Well, the circumstances are really very clear. My first teaching job after the war, at Sarah Lawrence, was to give a course in

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poetry. I could do anything I liked, so I devised a little course called "Virgil and Dante." Each year I would take a small group of students through the *Aeneid* and through *The Divine Comedy*, using the original languages. When I moved to Harvard after the long interval with Homer, I devised a little course called "Studies in Homer, Virgil and Dante." That kept the Virgil, so to speak, abreast of the Homer. Kept it alive in my mind. So, in 1978, four years after the completion of the *Iliad*, I was sitting in Boston's South Station waiting to get a train, and going over in my mind the Latin of certain lines at the beginning of Book Two of the *Aeneid.* I found these Latin lines taking English shape in my mind. Aeneas is beginning his remarks to Dido, the queen: a little story of the fall of Troy. So, he says:

> *Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem,*
> *Troianas ut opes et lamentabile regnum*
> *Eruerint Danai . . .*

And he goes on:

> *Et iam nox humida caelo*
> *Praecipitat suadentque cadentia sidera somnos.*

"The humid night is going down the sky . . . and the sloping stars are persuading slumber"—a literal translation, the sort of translation that a kid would make in class. So, I found myself uttering *this* sort of thing:

> *Now, too, the night is well along, with dewfall*
> *Out of heaven, and setting stars weigh down*
> *Our heads toward sleep.*

Well, I said to myself, "My God, I've got that!" *Now, too: dewfall*—the end of the line is symmetrical with the beginning of the line. *Out of heaven, and setting stars weigh down: Out* at the beginning of the line; *down* at the end. The secrets of music in this business are very subtle and strange; I did not see these sound patterns at the time, but eventually I realized that what I had had that kind of quality to it. Having done that, I said to myself, "Hmm, if I can do a few lines with this pleasure, why don't I do the whole thing?" And so I did.

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INTERVIEWER

Translating Homer, you avoided Latinisms as much as possible and made words of Anglo-Saxon origin the backbone of your language. But in the Virgil you seem to have employed a more Latinate vocabulary. Is the effect of Latin words in Latin really akin to that of Latin-derived words in English, where they've developed new connotations?

FITZGERALD

It's absolutely true that I avoided Latinisms in doing Homer; the Latin forms of the names of people and places were avoided in favor of the Greek. I wanted the *Greekness* of the thing to come across, and a lot of Latinate phrases would irresistibly have taken you back to the neoclassical, which I wanted utterly to skip . . . I wanted to skip Pope and Chapman because they all came to Greek so much through Latin. Their trots were in Latin, and kids in school, of course, learned Latin so thoroughly. Greek was always second for educated people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I wanted to skip all that and, if possible, to make it a transaction between Homer, 700 B.C., and Fitzgerald, 19-whatever. Between that language at that time and our language at this time. I don't think that these criteria were very much altered in doing the Virgil. A living English in our time had better be careful about Latinisms. Latinisms are so associated with mandarin English, with the English of Englishmen, not of Americans.

INTERVIEWER

In your introduction to Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid*, you speak of Dryden's clear perception of the difficulties any translator of Virgil faces. In Latin words there are, on the whole, as many vowels as consonants, whereas English words are cluttered with the latter. Latin is inflected, English is not, so that Virgil could rearrange word order at will for musical effect. Virgil exploits a nearly endless stock of figurative terms. How did you grapple with these problems?

FITZGERALD

Well, Dryden's despair, you know. I wouldn't say that I was

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overthrown very often by it, though it is true, toward the end of the poem, that more and more of what Dryden calls "figurative, elegant, and sounding words" keep coming in. The vocabulary is freshened. One copes with that. One keeps on doing the best one can with the problem of the moment, whether it be in speeches or in narrative, always, first of all, making sure that it's idiomatic English . . . that it's not muscle-bound or stiff.

INTERVIEWER

Arnold said that the distinguishing feature of Homer's verse is its rapidity. What quality of the *Aeneid* did you consistently try to bring over into English?

FITZGERALD

Well, I ventured to put as an epigraph to the book the line "*Aeternum dictis da diva leporem*," from *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius. This is a plea that the goddess (whom we may understand as Venus in Lucretius' case, or indeed as the Muse) should give eternal charm. Charm to the work. That the product should have an incantatory quality, as a charm, pronounced in the enchanter's way. Insofar as one can make a conscious effort to achieve this kind of thing, I suppose that here and there I've made it. "And setting stars weigh down/ Our heads toward sleep" is an example.

INTERVIEWER

When you speak of the music of poetry, what exactly do you mean?

FITZGERALD

Well, take from *Ash Wednesday*:

A pasture scene
And the broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the Maytime with an antique flute . . .

That's music. And one notices in the sounds. "Enchanted the Maytime with an antique flute"—*ant, ant, flute.* What comes into the Maytime thing, the colors blue and green, what the

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air is like on a day in mid-May, under the magnolias, the lilacs. The little echoing in the line—that's a kind of music, it seems to me. "*Formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas.*" This is from the First Eclogue. *Ryllida*, *silvas*—again an echoing, like a note in the bass on the piano, although in fact the right hand is carrying another melody, so you have this repetition in the left hand which insists on doing a second melody there. What the line is saying is one melody. What in counterpoint these little repetitions of sound are doing is another. The music is enriched as the music in a fugue is enriched by two things going on at once.

INTERVIEWER

In translating, do you try to mimic the music of the original?

FITZGERALD

That, or make an equivalent. It's what I meant when I said in the afterword to the *Odyssey* that translating the Greek of Homer into English is no more possible than translating rhododendron into dogwood. On the other hand, suppose you make dogwood?

INTERVIEWER

But wouldn't you want some relation?

FITZGERALD

You would like to convey as exactly as possible what is being conveyed in the Latin narrative. You want what is happening to be exactly what's happening in Homer's imagination, if you can, and then you want an English equivalent of the Latin music. The Latin music is very elaborate. Listen to this:

> *Vertitur interea coelum, et ruit oceano nox,*
> *Involvens umbra magna terramque polumque*
> *Myrmidonumque dolos.*

That's the full orchestra, really, the full orchestra. Let's see what the Latin turns out to be in English:

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As heaven turned, Night from the Ocean stream
Came on, profound in gloom on earth and sky
And Myrmidons in hiding.

There is at least the matching of the series of long vowels—*night*, *ocean*, *stream*, *came*, *profound*, *gloom*, *sky*, *hiding*—long open vowels that by their succession and echoing give something like the effect of the Latin. But it's English, it's carrying the story on. You don't have to listen to this music. If what you want to hear is the story, read the story.

INTERVIEWER

Robert Lowell wrote a little piece on epics in which he said, "Homer is blinding Greek sunlight. Virgil is dark, narrow, morbid, mysterious, and artistic. He fades in translation." What do you think of those adjectives Lowell racks up?

FITZGERALD

Well, too much has been made of texture. One of the things that I tried to bring out more fully, as I went along, was the pure narrative interest of this thing as a story. It's Aeneas's story, some of which he tells himself, and most of which he doesn't. The narrative, if it's properly rendered, is extremely interesting and exciting. What happened to Virgil (partly because of the curse of his being a text in the fourth year of secondary school, and also because of his having supplied so many tags for speakers in the House of Lords) is that the poem has been fragmented. The arc, the really quite magnificent arc of the original narrative, has been rather lost to view. Nobody ever reads the entire *Aeneid*. They read in school, if they read anything, Books Two, Four, Six, *maybe*, if they're lucky. That's it. Nobody ever reads the last six books. Yet in the last six books the whole thing happens, really. That's the man at war. That's the *arma* and the *virum*. I would love to think that the whole story will be restored to view. People can read it, and will read it, because it turns out to be readable.

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INTERVIEWER

It certainly seems that in the first half, Aeneas is an oddly stunned sort of hero, while in the second half he is commanding, even horrifyingly so.

FITZGERALD

Exactly. The tragic import of all this is what happens to a man wielding power, especially in hostilities of that kind. He goes as berserk as anybody. The point is very abundantly made that the Roman state was founded on war, on their being very good at war. I happened to reread Caesar, *The Battle for Gaul*, during the composition of the last six books, to see what, in fact, war was like in the generation preceding Virgil. Virgil certainly knew, as every Roman did, what it cost, and the exertion that was made to defeat these hordes of extremely hard-fighting Germans and Gauls. No doubt about the carnage, the incredible carnage: field after field left absolutely soaked in blood, with dismembered individuals for miles. The scene was one of great terror and desolation, all of this in order that Julius should become first consul and have his career. One does sense throughout the *Aeneid* the tragic import of Roman power, of what they were proudest of: their ability to defeat the tribes that came against them and then to create some kind of civil order in the provinces they conquered. But the cost of that, and the dreadful effects of these encounters of armed men, is very vividly brought out, and is one of the things that Virgil meant to bring out, along with the *pro forma* praises of the Roman heroes. A Roman *gladius*, or short sword, honed on both edges, was like a cleaver! A two-edged cleaver! Just imagine turning twenty thousand men with two-edged cleavers loose on the opposition!

INTERVIEWER

You once said that English poetry "hungers for a sound metaphysic," but that its history is largely a record of a failure of supply. What did you mean?

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FITZGERALD

English poetry "hungers for a sound metaphysic"? I was, I think, at the time, interested in the superior precision of Aristotle's *De Anima* as contrasted with Coleridge. I was thinking in particular of the difference between the Aristotelian and the Coleridgean views of what happens in creative work of the mind. I made my remarks, that's it. I never went out to argue.

INTERVIEWER

In the Agee memoir you speak of your brotherhood in the arts with him. Did you have a similar relationship with Lowell or Berryman or Auden? Did you consult them when you were working on your translations?

FITZGERALD

I certainly did. Not W. H. Auden, though, because we met so rarely. John Berryman saw what I was working on at the time and made a suggestion or two on word order which I adopted. Randall Jarrell also saw what I was working on one summer. He had an excellent notion. His notion, to put it briefly, was that if you're going to be colloquial, you can achieve the colloquial thing by gradation. You depart from the formality a little bit and then a little bit more, and then you're colloquial, and then you modulate away from it—modulate toward and modulate away from it. Such a beautiful idea! I don't know whether I really obeyed this or not. And Cal Lowell just said, "You've got it! This is a bullseye!" There is, after all, a brotherhood among people who are working at the same craft, who show each other what they're doing from time to time. The result's likely to be more helpful if your pal simply runs his hand down the page, stops, and does not say a word. Just stops. You see something's wrong where the finger's pointing, and that's enough.

INTERVIEWER

How did you get to know Lowell?

FITZGERALD

I met him through Randall Jarrell. Jarrell was teaching at

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Sarah Lawrence the first year I taught there, and we therefore saw one another every week and got to be friends. He brought Lowell along some evening or other and we had the evening together.

INTERVIEWER

Nowadays people tend to praise Jarrell's criticism and downplay his poetry. Do you think that's fair to his work?

FITZGERALD

No, I don't. I think quite a few of his poems are very good indeed. No one ever did anything remotely like what he did for the Air Force, for the carrier pilots, and all the rest of that.

INTERVIEWER

You've often said that you think poetry should be "chiefly hair-raising." At the same time, however, you've spoken of the desirability of a strong bond between the poet and the community he lives in—a bond that you seem to believe has been broken in modern times. Do you see any contradiction or tension between such social concern and the requirement that poetry be, above all, hair-raising?

FITZGERALD

Well, don't we have Emily Dickinson, the wondrous lady of Amherst, as an authority for that: "It's a poem if it makes you feel as though your head were taken off"? And A. E. Houseman: "If while I am shaving a line of poetry strays into my mind, my beard bristles so that I can't cut it"? This is an extreme, and this kind of poetry is part of the extreme literary experience—extreme both for the maker and for the reader. That's at one end of the spectrum. At the other end there is Dryden, sitting in his coffeehouse, turning out couplets to insult someone whom he feels like insulting. So, one has the gamut between what is essentially a private, we might say a metaphysical experience, and the other which is simply a refinement of prose—verse devoted to wit, or to the quotidian purpose of making something clear or making somebody ashamed, of ex-

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posing somebody, of putting into a witty form someone's foibles . . . which can be read with amusement and without a touch of the other extreme, which is private and rare and precious. I don't see why we can't live with a decent consciousness of these two poles of poetic experience. I once said, too, that poetry is at least an elegance and at most a revelation. That says it pretty well—"is at least an elegance"—something that is well-formed, readable, and then again something that takes you *up*.

INTERVIEWER

How close is the revelation of poetry to the religious experience of revelation?

FITZGERALD

Very close, I think. Very close indeed.

INTERVIEWER

You've spoken of a "third kind of knowledge" that came out of moments of vision you had as a young man. How important were they?

FITZGERALD

Terribly important. I don't think that anything could be more important than to be reminded that, as Flannery O'Connor used to say, "The church is custodian of the sense of life as a mystery." We get so used to it that we lose the sense. To have the sense restored to us—which the religious experience does and which the poetic experience at its extreme does as well—is a great boon.

INTERVIEWER

You say that you came back to the Church with a "terrific bump." What brought you back?

FITZGERALD

Well, a number of things that I really don't think I can satisfactorily speak of in this context.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think that the integration of poetry and the university since World War II has been harmful?

FITZGERALD

Maybe. At Harvard in my time there was Robert Hillyer's course in versification, and beyond that, very little indeed in the way of writing courses. An exceptional teacher at that time would be *au courant* with what was living and exciting about writing. Hillyer was exceptionally the other way. He was deliberately blind, deaf and dumb to what was going on in the avant-garde. I think one felt, in general, one wasn't going to get much attention from the faculty. If you wanted to put things in the undergraduate literary magazine, *The Advocate*, okay. *The Advocate* was . . . *The Advocate.* I don't think that people on the faculty paid much attention to these half-baked manifestations of literary ambition on the part of the undergraduates.

INTERVIEWER

Can we ask you about Flannery O'Connor and how you came to know her?

FITZGERALD

Flannery O'Connor came with Cal Lowell. Lowell and she and Elizabeth Hardwick turned up in New York together. They'd been at Yaddo and there was a dustup at Yaddo in which I'm afraid Lowell had begun to go off his trolley. At that point nobody really understood that this was the case, but we all understood it before it was over, very thoroughly. It was one of Lowell's very early, maybe his earliest breakdown. We met Flannery in the course of that, really, and then, of course, we went on independently of Lowell.

INTERVIEWER

You seem to have been something of a counselor to her. She would send her work to you, seeking your comments.

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FITZGERALD

I wouldn't want to build myself up. No, no, she knew what she was about. Owed nothing, I don't think, to me so far as the essence of these things was concerned. I supplied her with one title, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." I'd been driving through the South, and it just happened this was something one saw on the road signs. And I supplied her with some reasons for undertaking a revision of her novel, *The Violent Bear it Away*, which she did. I think she was better pleased with it after she'd done the revision. Those would be practically the only instances in which I had any effect on what she did. She was a good friend. One liked to see what she was working on. That was always great fun to see.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any younger poets whose work strikes you as outstanding?

FITZGERALD

I think that Robert Shaw has done quite beautiful work. He's a good critic and a good poet. He was here ten years ago; he was in my classes and performed very well in them. He went on to teach here and at Yale. Now he's at Mount Holyoke. He's very good. Who else? Brad Leithauser. He was in my writing class and turned out some amazingly good poems. His wife, Mary Jo Salter—she's also very good. And Katha Pollitt. James Atlas went on to do that good biography of Delmore Schwartz. I risk forgetting others who are just as interesting.

INTERVIEWER

So you think the world of poetry prospers apace?

FITZGERALD

That reminds me of Eugenio Montale's great piece on the encouragement of poetry, particularly by the state—National Endowments and things like that. He was very skeptical about the utility of encouraging poetry on a grand scale. Is encouragement what the poet needs? Open question. Maybe he needs

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discouragement. In fact, quite a few of them need more discouragement, the most discouragement possible.

INTERVIEWER

Has your career so far differed from your early expectations of it? Or didn't you have any expectations?

FITZGERALD

I don't know that I had any. I just hoped to keep on. I suppose I'd have been amazed when I was twenty to hear that before I was through, I would have translated Homer and the *Aeneid*. The notion that I should go in for these gigantic labors would have been completely out of this world. As I remember, when I was signing Elizabeth Bishop's *Iliad* for her, her only remark was, "*My*, all that *work!*"

—Edwin Frank
Andrew McCord

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Gjertrud Schnackenberg

Imaginary Prisons

A version of Sleeping Beauty
in memory of C.W.R.

The gardeners gazing through their open shears
Or staring sightless from their wooden ladders
Stand helpless by and dream they cannot lower

Their upraised sickles poised a hundred years
Above the labyrinth of stems, as briars,
Even while dreaming of their destinies

As smoke and ashes in the gardeners' fires,
Fasten themselves around the spellbound blades
And steal the dreamers' hats in mockery

To lift them out of reach of stick and ladder,
Then lose them on their way to taking over
The twilit walls and rooves and hundred chimneys

Against whose edifices chimney-swallows
Have woven for their families habitations
With rose-bud twigs and dust of crumbled mortar

And threads they've tugged gently as milliners
From out the silken shirts and ruffled trousers
Of failed princes hidden in the brambles,

The swallows unaware these men have starved
Entangled in their struggles with the briars.
Yet every year more numerous and scary

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These faces one by one among the roses
Bear witness to the private agony
Of what it means to have a single purpose.

Peacocks patrol the garden's sleeping borders
Malicious as a troop of evil fairies
Who pace and lash the brickwork with their feathers'

Opalescent hems, and pacing screech
How perilous is purity of heart.
And briars tentatively hoist their thorns

Across the dizzying ledges schisms form
Where being and non-being break apart.

* * *

The kitchen boy distracted by a quarrel
Is dreaming that he opens up a box
Of banished knives blinding even at twilight

And this way makes his adversary cower,
But ducks in fact before the furnace-stoker
Around whose lifted shovel embers sparkle

And hang like bumblebees around a flower.
And though you laugh, to them it greatly matters,
For they've had confirmation of the rumor

Touching upon the kitchen maid's betrothal,
The girl whom both of them have tried to capture
Like awkward brooms chasing a wind-borne feather

Today revealed her secret plans to marry
A wood-cutter from the adjoining forest
Who's older than both rivals put together,

The only man the girl has wanted ever.
But tell me, seeing how in joy her fingers
Touch her reflection in the plate of copper

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It is her task to breathe upon and burnish
As gently as a sleeper barely breathing,
Say who could wish the future on another?

For she must wake from momentary rapture
Into a grief approaching lunacy
To learn, among the skeletons of princes,

A humbler man has long since lost the struggle
And witnessed to the end the work of briars
As, blooming through his slowly loosened fingers,

They carried off his axe as if it were
A weightless toy among the waves of roses.
Upstairs her mistress in a sitting chamber

Has drawn a diamond from a velvet sack
Intending to bequeath it to her daughter,
But transfixed in the dream with palm outstretched

As though to weigh a flame she seems to shiver
In finding that the diamond, howsoever
Its light wobbles unstable as a fire,

Feels to her sightless fingers icy black.

* * *

The mountain ranges on the moon never
So near as now, never so clear, never
So brilliant with a brimming tenderness

As here before the court astronomer
Who sleeps beguiled at his telescope
And dreams he has beheld the final vision,

Granted after the lifetime he has given
To studying the systems of the night.
He dreams, sunk in a lit, celestial slumber,

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That lifting up his eyes he has observed
Beyond the black of night the boundary
And inner surface of the crystal sphere

And curved foundation wall of the sublime
By which we are enclosed, he dreams, with light,
Where black to rushing radiance is transformed

And matter into spirit evanesced.
He dreams his life's not wasted, furthermore,
For all is as his formulas suggest,

The diagrams and models of the worlds
Which he's spent years committing to the care
Of tranquil, pencil-covered papers rest

All in perfect accord with what he sees.
So let him sleep, and sleep enthralled, and never
Mind that it's a false discovery,

And please, don't pipe up that the obstacle
Of blackness which he dreams he's looking through
Is just as black as it was black before,

And fully insurmountable as ever.
For you and I know walls as high or higher,
And each of us has dreamed a private terror,

Or call it whatsoever you desire,
Disintegrates and blows away and clears
Our paths until we waken to discover

The very thing we thought had disappeared
Still waits for us in silence up ahead.
So leave him his perfected universe

Fulfilled as it was promised in his theory,
Leave him the page on which his calipers
Are perched and shining like a triangle

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Of light-beams springing from his pencil marks.
Leave him, though you and I are taught the sky
Is backed up by a blackness like a hammer

Already fallen on his circular
Irradiated dream as if the spheres
Were balls of glass shattered in jagged angles

Even geometry is dumbstruck by.

* * *

The seamstress caught up in a dream of sewing
Is dreaming that in lieu of banished scissors
She can't employ to cut an abstract pattern

She can't affix to cloth with banished pins,
Is dreaming that her two hands grip a flowing
Bolt of cloudy, lightning-colored fabric

Which she is poised with all her rapt attention
To tear in one electric flash of noise.
And clowning like a slave of comedy

The aging simpleton whom she has hired
In sympathy is pressing, in his fervor,
The bonnet top which he elects to wear

To keep the weather off winter and summer,
And dreaming of his job of chasing flies.
Beneath the shadow of his lifted swatter,

The housefly dreams she wrings her hands with worry.
Below this workshop lies the court's despairing
Lone perpetual insomniac,

Alarmed as if he overheard their dreaming.
But seeing how he's grown perversely eager,
Lying flat out and hopeless on his back,

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To learn at last which sound will finally shatter
His nerves so thoroughly that it will keep
His body, mind, and soul awake forever,

I'll grant you that it's something of a challenge
To stifle giggles, for, with sheets and covers
Pulled up around his wakeful head adorned

With layered nightcaps like a crown of flannel
With puffy parts for muffling the ears,
He looks like some unheard of king of cabbage

Condemned forever in his lonely garden
To dreaming that he cannot fall asleep.

* * *

Assigned to live next door, because he's silent,
Though under lock and key, because he's mad,
The ruler's brother sits with elbows propped

And hands holding his face above the trestle,
Regarding through the prison of his fingers
The spectre of an empty china platter

As he's regarded it for countless years
Since he was thunder-stricken to discover
A trivial flaw disastrous to his theory

In which the world is made of porcelain,
But porcelain that cannot crack or shatter
As demonstrated in his published paper,

"The Paradigm of Glass Unbreakable,"
With which he thought to rectify the anger
Of those like him who'd keenly felt the bitter

Accident of being dropped and broken.
And yet the dunderheads refused to hear!
And given that the blind, refining forces

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Which glaze the world in an ideal fire
Appeared to have no meaning to the others,
He ceased evangelizing and retired,

Dropping exhausted to his study chair,
And turned to meditation to restore
His faith and to refresh his memory

By summoning the spectre of a platter
To represent our wholly perfect order,
And that's the moment, as I said before,

That this unfortunate was struck by thunder
And terrified to see, and no mistaking,
The surface showed the first hint of a fissure,

A web of cracks across the porcelain
Like black lightning unrolled and fixed forever
Into the lightly shattered glaze was creeping,

A test of faith which lengthened year by year
Before his swearing of a vow to stare
Until the fragile web of laws breaking

The tragic glaze apart come to appear
To be the laws by which it's held together.

* * *

Behind the man trapped in the labyrinths
And mazes of his theory's shattered beauty,
The chimney sweep like an incongruous

And homely soldier standing at attention
Is troubled into a dream of reverence
Since he in the fulfillment of his duty

With savage mop widowed a chimney-swallow
Whose voice, he dreams, still flutes from out of doors
Like a petition for the simplest mercy,

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Calling his mate back from a territory
No map-maker is hired to consider,
One prison engineered within another

And hidden in the blackness of the chimney.
Though you and I are schooled in the motto
That goes, "A stranger's tears are only water,"

Though we hold in the very least regard
The sentiments of such a worthless rascal
As does to death an ordinary swallow,

And though you scoff that having murdered her
The boy is stunned before her crumpled figure,
That he once having seen the swallow fallen,

And with a premonition of disaster,
Is moved to doff his cap and mourn in honor
Of one however small who has crossed over

The line dividing nothingness from history,
If you think "nothingness" goes way too far,
If "history" is the word that sets you crowing

It isn't history if it isn't written—
It's written here, and written here in favor
Of one who's flown ahead of us to enter

That nothing than which there is nothing vaster.

* * *

The angelfish streaming their whispered letters
Are dreaming they turn back from what they whisper
To flee along their unseen, drifting ladders,

Abandoned in the poet's empty quarters
Since he was carted off a prisoner
And charged, lacking the benefit of lawyers,

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With sharpening his pencil to a point
Nearly approaching the invisible.
Absurd, you say, that any could consider

A pencil point a real and present danger,
Yet here he keeps, in the remotest tower,
The company of sundry malefactors

All dressed in jailbird hats and jailbird shirts,
And dreams his angelfish are drawing near
The paper he's spread out across his table,

Like candle flames they flicker as they whisper
The letters he transcribes, and back and forth
Their wobbling reflections through the water

Give to the page an underlight of fire
As if fire were a property of paper.
And drowsing next to him, the king's bird-keeper

Arrested for importing foreign birds
Sharp-beaked enough to constitute a peril,
Is dreaming that the brass keys of the jailer

Chirp in the locks of manacles and fetters,
Soft as the first in all the aviary
To voice a note before the blackness clears.

Nearby the drunkard dreams of foaming beer,
The counterfeiter dreams of flawless money
That issues from his confiscated needle

In spectral temples, webs, and ghostly scrolls
Blooming in portraitures of shadowed numerals.
Nearby the painter, dragged in by the collar

For spending his allotment for a year's
Supply of paints on one half-ounce of umber
Is dreaming that his new-laid patch of plaster

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Is parching dry as desert sand before
He's able to complete his fragmentary
Fresco of utopian waterways

Where dolphin leaps like transitory doors
To palaces across the water form
Shining parabolas above canals.

* * *

Here too, wrongly denounced as a false servant
When he foresaw the devastating scandal
Attendant on the infant's christening,

And then arrested on the ruler's orders
When he described the blackness furthermore
Which Beauty at the hour of betrayal

Would see within the light of birthday candles,
The court's clairvoyant dreams that on the stairs
That spiral downward to his darkened parlor,

His wife is standing stricken at the door,
Reading the posted writ of his arrest
As if the black-gloved hand of the informer

Were laid directly on her narrow shoulder.
And you and I can see: his dream is true.
Nodding above his handcuffs in the corner,

And exiled from all company, but for
The presence of two mirror-image spiders
Who dream they wage an obscure tournament,

The traitor dreams of climbing up a ladder
Reaching from prison moat to prison tower,
Although a tower less and less familiar,

And dreams, casting his eyes over his shoulder,
He sees the ladder upside-down in water,
Himself as he climbs higher growing smaller,

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Himself as he looks downward looking upward,
And dreams he scrambles, falls, and crashes toward
His death with outstretched arms, and there

Is met by no one but the water's mirrored
Looming, panicked image of himself.

* * *

The king's uneasiness at coming trauma
Compels him to the shop of the clock-maker
Where one by one on his more desperate orders

According to his right of search-and-seizure
The kingdom's clocks were hauled in all together
And all of them, like world-is-ending seers

Incarcerated for the way they chatter,
Telling obsessively a single story
Over and over, all reduced the ruler

To telling them, Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!
And now dismantled, emptied, strewn in parts
Across the benches, tables, sills, and floors,

They've fallen silent as their very maker
Who sits with his demolished masterworks
And following instructions slowly lowers

His brush dejected into paint-dissolver
To swab away the black of painted numbers
From every clockface in the territory,

The disassembled royal water chimes,
The cuckoo clocks wearing a look of terror,
The grandfathers dumped out like ransacked drawers,

The microcosmic wheels and golden gears
And useless screws and labyrinths of wires
And miniature bells and gongs and hammers

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And swaying springs like just-beheaded roses
And black unfastened dials pointing where
There's nothing left to point at but the ruler

Who with his crown exchanged for the watch-maker's
Headband with the lens extended forward,
Is breathless with attention bending over

The timepiece of his father's father's father
Which he is touching with the jeweler's
Diminutive, unaging pair of tweezers

As if to halt once and for all the source
Of seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years.
And this is how we find him, as he stares

Sightless into the ruined factory
Bequeathed to him, and dreams that he discovers
The future isn't manufactured there—

It's manufactured somewhere in the past,
The present in the past, past in the past,
It lies beyond his legislative power

Though banging gavels bring his courts to order
And pound out points of law as sharp or sharper
Than pencils, pins and needles, knives and scissors:

The future in the past is fixed forever,
Like words locked up in pencils, webs in spiders,
Like flames imprisoned in the match tip's sulphur,

Like thorns locked up in seeds hidden in roses
Imprisoned in the budding stems of briars.
He cannot overrule the condemnation:

More patient than a needle in a drawer,
It is the past that lies in wait for her,
Concealing in a point grown ever sharper

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The blood-drops of the mock assassination—

* * *

And rightly dreams he cannot save another.
And though you rush to say he rests assured
Of the compassion of the dispensation,

And though the promised torch already burns
By which the briars are lit and roses turn
To smoke and ashes in the gardeners' fires

Through which the true prince walks and is unharmed,
I've learned to make a study of the hour
When grander schemes that mock our calculations

Reveal that we're the emblems standing for
The consequence of what we cannot master.
Say what you wish about the past and future,

But we have learned that here and now is where
All time stops in a face we've held as dear
As she is held who's overcome with roses,

And now is never where the promised fires
Are burning, but the time that's set apart
For you and I to stand and sightless stare,

As gardeners gazing through their open shears
Stand in the shadows of the promised briars.

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. . . Only twisted whims of Mist
Through the Sleeves passed like Arms . . .

Austė

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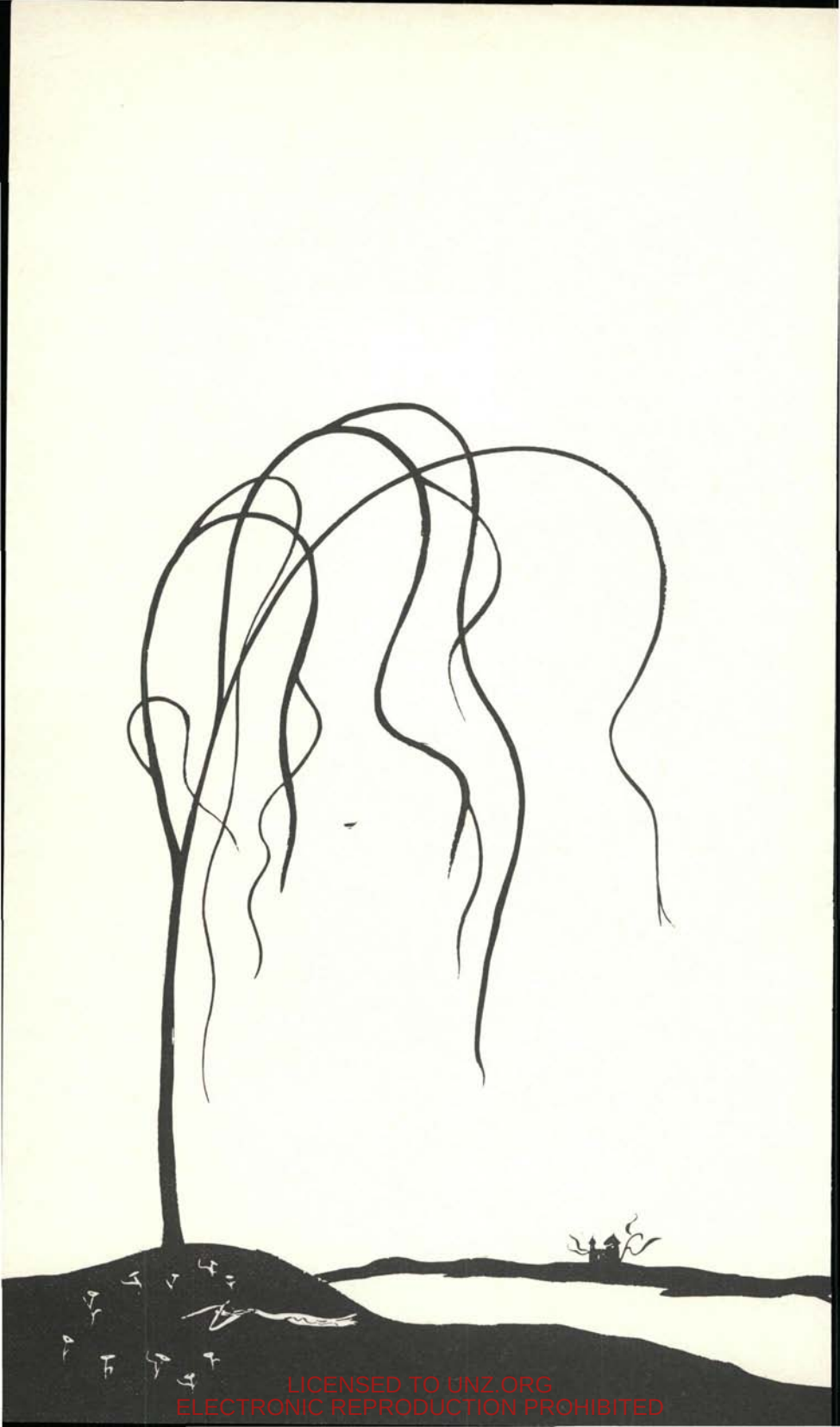

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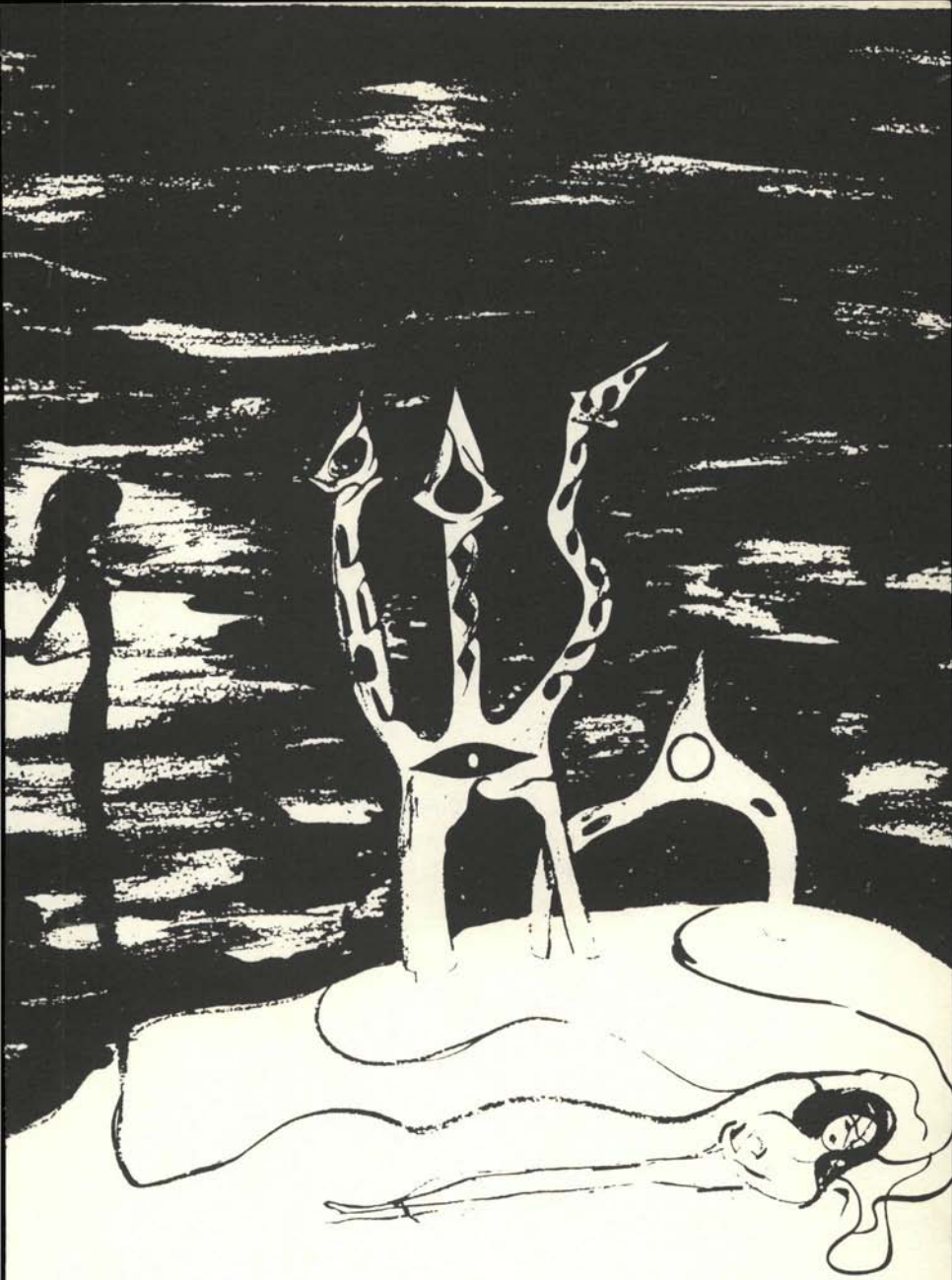

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Wanting An Orange

Larry Woiwode

Oh, those oranges arriving in the midst of the North Dakota winters of the forties—the mere color of them, carried through the door in a net bag or a crate from out of the white, winter landscape. Their appearance was enough to set my brother and me to thinking that it might be about time to develop an illness, which was the surest way of receiving a steady supply of them.

"Mom, we think we're getting a cold."

"*We*? You mean, you two want an orange?"

This was difficult for us to answer or dispute; the matter seemed moved beyond our mere wanting.

"If you want an orange," she would say, "why don't you ask for one?"

"We want an orange."

" 'We' again. '*We want an orange.*' "

"May we have an orange, please."

"That's the way you know I like you to ask for one. Now, why don't each of you ask for one in that same way, but separately?"

"Mom . . ." And so on. There was no depth of degradation that we wouldn't descend to in order to get one. If the oranges hadn't wended their way northward by Thanksgiving, they were

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sure to arrive before the Christmas season, stacked first in crates at the depot, filling that musty place, where pews sat back to back, with a springtime acidity, as if the building had been rinsed with a renewing elixir which set it right for yet another year. Then the crates would appear at the local grocery store, often with the top slats pried back on a few of them, so that we were aware of a resinous smell of fresh wood, in addition to the already orangy atmosphere that foretold the season more explicitly than any calendar.

And in the broken-open crates (as if burst by the power of the oranges themselves), one or two of the lovely spheres would lie free of the tissue they came wrapped in—always purple tissue, as if that were the only color that could contain the populations of them in their nestled positions. The crates bore paper labels at one end—of an orange against a blue background, or of a blue goose against an orange background—signifying the colorful otherworld (unlike our wintry one) that these phenomena had arisen from. Each orange, stripped of its protective wrapping, as vivid in your vision as a pebbled sun, encouraged you to picture a whole pyramid like this in a bowl on your dining room table, glowing in the light, as if giving off the warmth that came through the windows from the real winter sun. And all of them came stamped with a blue-purple name as foreign as the otherworld that you might imagine as their place of origin, so that on Christmas day you would find yourself digging past everything else in your Christmas stocking, as if tunneling down to the country of China, in order to reach the rounded bulge at the tip of the toe which meant that you had received a personal reminder of another state of existence, wholly separate from your own.

The packed heft and texture, finally, of an orange in your hand—this is it!—and the eruption of smell and the watery fireworks as a knife, in the hand of someone skilled, like our mother, goes slicing through the skin so perfect for slicing. This gaseous spray can form a mist like smoke, which can then be lit with a match to create actual fireworks, if there is a chance to hide alone with a match (matches being forbidden) and the peel from one. Sputtery ignitions can also be produced by

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squeezing a peel near a candle (at least one candle is generally always going at Christmastime), and the leftover peels are set on the stovetop to scent the house.

And the ingenious way in which oranges come packed into their globes! The green nib at the top, like a detonator, can be bitten off, as if disarming the orange, in order to clear a place for you to sink a tooth under the peel. This is the best way to start. If you bite at the peel too much, your front teeth will feel scraped, like dry bone, and your lips begin to burn from the bitter oil. Better to sink a tooth in this greenish or creamy depression, and then pick at that point with the nail of your thumb, removing a little piece of the peel at a time. Later, you might want to practice to see how large a piece you can remove intact. The peel can also be undone in one continuous ribbon, a feat which maybe your father is able to perform, so that after the orange is freed, looking yellowish, the peel, rewound, will stand in its original shape, although empty.

The yellowish whole of the orange can now be divided into sections, usually about a dozen, by beginning with a division down the middle; after this, each section, enclosed in its papery skin, will be able to be lifted and torn loose more easily. There is a stem up the center of the sections like a mushroom stalk, but tougher; this can be eaten. A special variety of orange, without any pits, has an extra growth or nubbin, like one half of a tiny orange, tucked into its bottom. This nubbin is nearly as bitter as the peel but it can be eaten, too; don't worry. Some of the sections will have miniature sections imbedded in them and clinging as if for life, giving the impression that babies are being hatched, and should you happen to find some of these you've found the sweetest morsels of any.

If you prefer to have your orange sliced in half, as some people do, the edges of the peel will abrade the corners of your mouth, making them feel raw, as you eat down into the white of the rind (which is the only way to do it) until you can see daylight through the orangy bubbles composing its outside. Your eyes might burn; there is no proper way to eat an orange. If there are pits, they can get in the way, and the slower you eat an orange the more you'll find your fingers sticking together. And

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no matter how carefully you eat one, or bite into a quarter, juice can always fly or slip from a corner of your mouth; this happens to everyone. Close your eyes to be on the safe side, and for the eruption in your mouth of the slivers of watery meat, which should be broken and rolled fine over your tongue for the essence of orange. And if indeed you have sensed yourself coming down with a cold, there is a chance that you will feel it driven from your head—your nose and sinuses suddenly opening—in the midst of the scent of a peel and eating an orange.

And oranges can also be eaten whole—rolled into a spongy mass and punctured with a pencil (if you don't find this offensive) or a knife, and then sucked upon. Then, once the juice is gone, you can disembowel the orange as you wish and eat away its pulpy remains and eat once more into the whitish interior of the peel which scours the coating from off your teeth and makes your numbing lips and the tip of your tongue start to tingle and swell up from behind, until, in the light from the windows (shining through an empty glass bowl), you see orange again from the inside. Oh, oranges, solid *os*, light from afar in the midst of the freeze, and not unlike that unspherical fruit which first went from Eve to Adam and from there (to abbreviate matters) to my brother and me.

"Mom, we think we're getting a cold."

"You mean, you want an orange?"

This is difficult to answer or dispute or even to acknowledge, finally, with the fullness that the subject deserves, and that each orange bears, within its own makeup, into this hard-edged yet insubstantial, incomplete, cold, wintry world.

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Two Poems and a Translation by Jim Powell

Heat

Everyone else slept and we
were skinny-dipping in my mother's pool
when the moon rose and birds

sang for high summer in a valley oak
whose seedling I mowed carefully around
twenty years ago.

Back in Berkeley the next day
light from the water where we troubled it
still glanced back from the leaves, a look

of recognition on each changing face,
and the tart fume of just-cut grass that lifted
from the park recalled

that morning's cool persuasions,
dew clinging in the brazen glare of noon.
It was as if that shore

where all forgotten things will find their lasting
home was never lost or touched by need
but day by day was spared

for our return—as though, downtown
where a half block of stores burned to the ground
last month, the damp of ashes still

inhabiting the air (full and rough
feathered at the back of my tongue) coaxed
a thirst for nothing

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but the thin creek barely
moving in the shadows under a bridge.
Sheltering there, watching

sunlight slice down between the planks to rule
sharp lines across the stream and mark its passage,
I forget the time.

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A Letter

Dear Lowell,
Berkeley had its first fall rain
this afternoon: droplets still shine along
the plum tree's wrinkled twigs outside my window,
at rest in their forks or clinging to the curled
edges of leaves dark as the Pinot Noir
pressed, casked, aged and poured from grape clusters
harvesting now seventy miles north of here.
Five months ago plum branches shook thick green
shadows against the pane and hid the shouts
of children out of school who dropped their bikes
below the limbs they straddled to take all
the fruit unripe.
I put on "Nessun dorma"
to remind me: while Puccini's last
tenor aria overwhelms the soundtrack
of Jack Hazan's film, the artist runs a long
stainless steel kitchen knife into his painting
—atonal soprano rasps from its parting weave
score the crescendo as his shaking white
knuckles lock on the canvas to tear through
the figure of his lover's painted face
because it wasn't true.
Later, he'll start
over, darker hills from the south of France
for his background, and leave a space pure white,
its clear-cut vacancy outlined for the loved
image to fill when he's composed it from
thirty snapshots taken one afternoon
in Kensington Gardens: each locks the boy
in the same awkward pose, as if the lens
looked and looked at its model, trying to find

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and fix the one he looks for when he turns
so stiffly inward.
Watching the painter's hands,
I thought how one I meant to love would not
stand still inside the likeness I had made
but broke out of that settled clearing to
become another person and swept through
everything I felt true like a dull scythe
over and over
till the simple world
of darkened windows, quiet streets and sidewalks
quailed in the clear double ranks of slowly
counted lampposts, as if in their sharp line
nothing could hold its ground but took cover,
and what I walked in were the travesties
I kept in mind to people cryptic regions
only desire inhabited. Every named
and graceful thing they stood in place of fell
silent.
One night, coming home late, I thought I found
a present in the mail. Then I knew what it was,
and forced a laugh at the gross craft staining
immaculate cardboard with just my address
and, in large electric-blue block letters,
"FREE GIFT"—watched myself watch its missing name
provoke stumbling fingers to tear it open
and find out at once what I knew already.

But it wasn't soap I smashed against the wall
in sudden, silly, furious tears because
it was only a bar of sample soap.
"It was only a pictured face," I wanted to rant
back at Hazan's film, "not the gift you looked for"
—and with that want from memory filled the shape
left white and waiting on the canvas. But when we
watched it together you found another entrance
opened between us there,

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both taken in
to an aria in a language we can't speak
and almost understand, always just out
of reach and moving toward us—like the song
inside Tom Constanten's "Dejavalse."
I think it was almost this time of year
I first heard that ragtime American
slow country piano waltz, its tune so strong
the words to marry it seem just ready
to rise half-heard inside each passing note.
I've tried to catch them half-a-dozen times
but I can't quite get them right.
They'd say that
close friends around a table, good dope,
talk shared till dawn in a kitchen over wine
after the party's left, can last awhile
making a place to rest beside the stove
that outburns every dark and cold, outlasts
all of the busyness that breaks and breaks
our circles. The words call me there and know
the promises they give aren't kept and say so
in the tune's lilt and braggart sweetness, its
forgiving mockery.
Now the friends
I think of to recall that scene have scattered:
one's gone to Italy, another's here
but distant, I've quarreled with a third, and the house
and stove were sold. In German, one of them told me,
gift means *poison*—that must be why we call
them *free*, to think that what we take does not
constrain allegiance. A free gift was what
I wanted, given like the sun that sinks
unseen above the slow plane mass of clouds
hunching from sea to foothills:
through a strip
cleared in the west it strikes full on the Bay,
hammers that choppy steel to one wide sheet
of blinding light where Alcatraz lies anchored,

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a black cutout battleship, guns trained
on the Marin headlands. If you were there
tonight you'd hear foghorns whose calls describe
the distances where real ships move and pass
under the bridge they can't see from the water
yet know is there: a phosphorescent ghost
swept by the steady, circling scan, its shadow
fills their dark screens.
Thinking of you in Paris,
I imagine the line of down and pale skin running
clear from your throat to the blondish tuft below,
a sign our bodies share as if it kept
the memory of their first cell's division
that constitutes us separate and whole
and leaves this mark no other scar effaces,
this condition of our custom with the earth
where our uncertain calls and answers start.

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Horace: Snow Drifts

(*from* Odes 1.9)

Look how the snow drifts
flare on Soracte's slopes
—there, straining branches
barely sustain their white
load. Locked in ice, streams
buckle, send cracks
stuttering over the winter's sharp still.

Unclasp this cold, stir
flame in the embers, pile
the hearth with fat logs.
Bring out a bottle warm
with a summer four years
gone, wine that grapes
pressed from the sunlight on Sabine hillsides.

Leave the rest to the gods:
once they have overthrown
the winds and laid dead
calm on the restless sea,
black cypress, old ash
never stir, rest
still as the shade in Persephone's groves.

Today, don't ask
what tomorrow may be:
whatever time chance
gives you, put down for profit;
and don't reject love
now you're young, don't
break from the ring where you dance with linked hands

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while grumbling old age
keeps its snow from your hair.
Now while you still can,
in the cafes, through parks
and plazas hunt out
gentle whispers
under the cover of evening's short hours

and welcome laughter
from intimate corners,
the girls who hide there
giving themselves away,
and rings or bracelets,
charms snatched for love
tokens from fingers that hardly resist.

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A Warhol Portrait Gallery

Literary Section

A while back, Andy Warhol's camera replaced his ever-present tape recorder. It was probably around the time he was going to nightclubs like Studio 54 every night; he couldn't have a conversation, let alone tape one, over all that music. His camera serves the same two purposes as his tape recorder. It freezes the surroundings of a tireless social animal—one whose own celebrity and curiosity has led him into what the people-watching public might think of as the most elusive and exclusive circles and corners. With his hundreds of photos, he could publish his own hybrid of *People* and *W* every morning.

The camera's second function is a little more personal. Andy can be very shy. The camera acts as his decoy or bodyguard—an instant cure for awkward situations. It removes the pressure from himself, placing the self-consciousness on the subject. Whereas the snap-flash stuns and flatters strangers and the star-struck, keeping them at an appreciable and appreciated distance, it's also a show of respect and sometimes an introduction to fellow celebrities. Whatever the intentions, Andy's photographs, as well as his paintings, his magazine, and his films, are chapters in a remarkably detailed chronicle of the last two-and-a-half decades of Pop culture.

The following are photographs of writers, poets, and autobiographers who have crossed Andy's path over the last few years. We discussed the photographs with Andy one afternoon while he did repetitive, chest-building exercises with twelve pound dumbbells in his studio, the Factory.

—**Robert Becker**

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Truman Capote

At this moment he might have been coming in from getting his face lifted . . . coming out of the doctor's office. Actually most of the major work had already been done. This time he was getting his forehead done. It had one line in it. He was great-looking for a while there: he lost 100 pounds, had his hair done, his teeth, his face, and then all of a sudden—after looking great for a year—he fell apart again. But I'd have my face lifted at the drop of a hat. I spent a day with Truman once, interviewing him. I went with him to his psychiatrist. His psychiatrist was really nice. Maybe he was a little surprised to have me sitting there with Truman. I told him I wasn't going to use his name or anything.

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Jim Carroll

I've known him from years ago. He was just a young kid then, writing poetry. I don't know him so well now. He's a big rock star. He's very famous. He's actually great. Very, very great. I don't know the name of his group—I think it's Jim Carroll and His Group, I think. I don't know what his group is.

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Stephen Spender

I took this picture of Stephen Spender and Christopher Isherwood when I was over in England a while ago. Baron Rothschild took us up to Spender's house for dinner. I think that's a bottle of Rothschild wine Spender is holding. I think Isherwood was mad at us for taking pictures. I guess it was when I was a little fresher—I took pictures without even asking. I ask more now, or I don't even do it. It was a really intellectual evening. I don't think they liked us. I went with Bob Colacello.

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Allen Ginsberg

I don't know who the person is with Allen Ginsberg. A young protegé of his, I think—I don't remember now. I love Allen's things. He was in some of the really early films—nothing too serious—perhaps *Couch*, just sitting there not doing anything. Maybe he just walked in while we were filming *Couch*, I'm not sure. I enjoy his music, those finger cymbals. I can listen to them a lot. He's such a great poet. I've never done a painting of him. I've never thought of it until just now but it's a great idea.

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William Burroughs

William Burroughs is an old friend. I have known him off and on for a long time. I think Bianca Jagger was interviewing him in the dining room of the Factory. He's generous about posing and doing almost anything for anybody. He's an elegant dresser. Really very neat. He often wears a hat but then here he's indoors. I don't know why he's carrying a cane but he is really a very elegant dresser. I have a lot of pictures of him. He's a good talker too.

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Gore Vidal

Gore Vidal is a good dresser too. Everything he does is a great contribution. I try to read all his books but sometimes I don't finish them. But I buy them all. I keep them all over—not in one place. The latest one [*Lincoln*] is sitting on my table. I can find that one in a minute. The woman who is almost out of the picture is a writer too. She's Monique Van Vooren who was interviewing Gore for *Interview*. She's pretty big, perhaps not as big as Gore, but she'll be big. She's writing a TV series. I think the interview with Gore took place in a hotel. We just came to listen in. It went really well. It didn't make him nervous to have us around. We're old friends.

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Jimmy Carter

© Hollis Stein

I took this picture down wherever he lives [Plains, Georgia]. It was before he was elected. I went down there to do a poster for a benefit. I did two of them. He was actually very great. They were *all* very great. Actually the best part of being down there was meeting Don King [the boxing promoter with the hair that stands up like a shaving brush]. That was really the most exciting. I have some pictures of him, but then he's not a writer. You can have a picture if you say he's not a writer. Mr. Carter has written a book though I have not read it yet.

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Rod McKuen

Rod McKuen is actually a friend of Brigid Berlin's. We seem to know each other; he seems friendly. This must have been a book-signing party, or at the Factory. It's pretty crowded so it must have been somewhere, some public place. I don't know who the man with the pop eyes is. I think Rod is a major poet. I just got his calendar in which he has a poem for every day.

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Shirley MacLaine

Shirley MacLaine is such a great actress and now she writes great books. This snap was done when she was trying politics. She was with Bella Abzug and Elizabeth Taylor at a press conference. I think she's finally decided she doesn't want to do that anymore. I believe in everything she writes—all that spiritual stuff—and in reincarnation too. I would like to come back in my next life as another Andy Warhol. And then another. A steady succession.

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James Baldwin

This picture was snapped in either Cannes or Deauville. I can't remember. Some film festival. I wasn't sitting with James Baldwin. I just went up and snapped this picture. It looks like a living room but it was a ballroom. He doesn't call up when he comes to town. I've known him for a long time but not really well.

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Viva

This is Viva with her daughter (she has two children) Alexandra. She's one of the most talented writers around. I can't wait until she does her next book. She wrote *The Baby* and *Superstar.* She writes all the time . . . very hard, though here she is at some cocktail party . . . We just snap the pictures and hope for the best. It isn't selection. It's picking whatever you can get.

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Orphans of the Storm

Mary Morris

I have a sister named Alice who's only eight months older than I am. The reason for this eludes most people. My parents adopted Alice before they figured out my mother was already pregnant with me. And people, when they hear we're sisters, say, "Oh yes, you look just alike. Around the eyes." Alice and I don't look anything alike. She is a tall, buxom redhead and the rest of us are tiny brunettes. Alice has always stood out in a crowd.

On holidays, I usually don't have anyplace to go. Our parents retired to a desert community in the Southwest, and so I go to Alice's house. It is a standing invitation and I only have to call if I'm not coming. It has been this way ever since Alice married Jim. Actually, Jim says he was hooked by Alice, but this isn't true. She simply told him he had two years from the day she finished college to decide if he was going to marry her. When the date rolled around, Alice told Jim she loved him but it was over. For a month she wouldn't see him or speak to him on the phone. Then he proposed.

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Alice tells me I need a strategy with men. Every once in a while, when something doesn't work out for me, I wind up on Alice's doorstep and she always takes me in.

A few days before Christmas I call Alice to say I'm coming. Normally this isn't necessary, but originally I'd called to say I wasn't. The man I've been seeing on and off this past year decided at the last minute to go skiing in Colorado. I don't really understand the reasons, but Alice doesn't ask questions either.

It is snowing when the train pulls in. On the train, an old man sits in front of me. He has two paper bags filled with gifts, all wrapped in a sloppy way, with dirty bows stuck on. The man seems confused and keeps asking me if we've reached Wilmette. When we get to Wilmette, he gets off and wanders away into the snow. I want to see if someone is there to meet him, but Alice comes up and hugs me and the old man is gone. Alice never hugs me very hard. In fact I've always thought, since I was old enough to think such things, that Alice's hug feels more like she's pushing me away. She has a sharp, angular jawbone and I can feel it press sharply against my cheek.

I didn't always love Alice, but one day I suddenly did. We were walking down a street together in Oak Park and a tall, redheaded woman who looked just like Alice walked right by us. Alice looked at the woman and the woman looked at her. The woman paused, hesitated, started to speak. But Alice just grabbed my hand and we walked away quickly. Alice was crying by the time we got home and she told me never to tell our mother what we'd seen. It was the first time I really knew she belonged to us.

Alice lives in a big stone house. In the winter, there's always a fire going in the fireplace. We walk into her house arm in arm. Stockings hang from the mantel and Alice tells me they've decided to wait and open their presents when I'm there. She says, "So, this guy's in Colorado skiing, huh? . . ."

"I don't want to talk about it. I wasn't nuts about him anyway."

Alice nods but I don't think she comprehends the notion. She has been nuts about Jim for fifteen years. Once she told me that to this day whenever he touches her, she goes wild.

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Jim works for Sunbeam and helps develop small appliances. Alice's house is filled with these appliances. Little filter machines to clean the air. Hand vacuums. Tiny electric fans you can carry in your purse.

Alice has two redheaded children, Sara and Teddy, and they grab me around the ankles as I walk in. Jim leans over to kiss me. He's making breakfast. He's got eggs scrambling in the electric frying pan and bacon in the microwave and muffins in the toaster oven and coffee in the coffee maker and juice whirring around in the blender. He is the essence of efficiency as he moves quickly from one appliance to another. "How's my little Pebble?" he asks. Pebble is an old nickname from my youth. When he was dating Alice, back in high school, I always went along. He called me the pebble in his shoe. Then just Pebble.

Alice reaches her face up to kiss Jim hello. She's only been gone half an hour but they seem eager to kiss. Alice's cheeks are rosy and a droplet of mucus hangs from the tip of her nose. Jim kisses her. Then with his finger he wipes the drop away and onto his jeans. No one has ever with his own finger wiped nasal drip from my nose.

If I think back, it is the first Christmas I've been single in ten years. It's also the first Christmas I haven't been miserable in ten years. So what is worse, I ask myself. I think how maybe I should call that man in Colorado and tell him just forget it.

We flock to the living room to open the gifts. At first there seems to be some system to the opening. Teddy and Sara sit near their presents like dogs being trained to wait for a biscuit. First they open their stocking stuffers one at a time and display whatever Santa gave them. Then they open all the packages that are not from Santa and give Alice the cards. Alice carefully records the name of the person who gave the gift, so that thank-you notes can be written. Then the system falls apart and we all tear open our presents.

I give Alice a lavender sweater and a pair of lavender socks. She quickly pulls the sweater on to show me it fits. She is radiant. I reach down to open what she's bought me. "I don't know," she mumbles. "Maybe I should have gotten you something more

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practical." But I'm already opening my gifts. The first is my stocking stuffer. It is a small booklet, about one inch by two, entitled *What I Know About Men.* It looks like one of those flip books of animation but when I flip the pages they're all blank.

Alice and I fall over laughing. Then I open a present. It is a paperweight with a single drop inside that Alice said reminded her of me. And finally I get a large silver angel to stick on my wall. A guardian angel.

After the presents are exchanged, we begin to get ready for dinner. We examine the silver and check the glasses. Everything matches. In my apartment, I have three Irish coffee glasses, two brandy snifters and four wine glasses, but they're all different. Nothing goes together.

I look at Alice, polishing silver, raising a platter to see her face. Though this is hard for me to admit, Alice is perfect. Her house is perfect. It is decorated with angels and lights. And she knows all of this. Knows how to make a list for thank-you notes, knows how to set the table for twenty people with everything matching. How to test the silver with her reflection.

When the table is set, Alice taps me on the arm. "Come on," she says, "we're going somewhere." We get in the car and drive. After a few minutes I grow impatient and want to know where we're going. Alice smiles. "I want a puppy. I want Jim to have a puppy." I say all right, so we drive to Orphans of the Storm, the kennel not far from where we grew up, where we'd had all our dogs put to sleep.

The kennel has the stench of dog droppings and Lysol. A man in a white coat shows us to the cages where dogs yelp and jump, and bang themselves into the wire. There are all kinds of dogs. I tell Alice to take a red one to go with her hair. The dogs howl and never take their eyes off us. They bark as if they've been waiting for us all along.

There are beautiful dogs with mottled coats. There's a husky with yellow-green eyes. But Alice stops in front of the ugliest dog I've ever seen. He has a blue eye and a brown one and part of his ear has been bitten away. He is mangy and has big flat

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paws. He doesn't bark or jump. He follows us with his calm, steady stare. He doesn't seem to expect very much. Alice says she'll take that one, because otherwise he'd never find a home.

Everyone likes Buick immediately. That's the dog's name. Somebody found him in an abandoned Buick. But Buick is not so sure how he feels about his new home. He sulks and wags his tail tentatively. To me he appears ungrateful, but Alice says he'll come around.

Just before dinner, I go upstairs to take a shower. The bathroom is through their bedroom and Alice has neatly laid out my towels. Before going back into the guest room, I open Alice's closet.

First I find bags of clothing, complete with labels. "Transitional spring and fall, except for corduroy," and "Jim's summer suits." And then inside the closet, the blouses, the skirts, the suits and pants, all sit in their proper place. I move on to shoes. Each pair of shoes is in a box and each box has a label. Green sling-backs from Field's, suede pumps with purple flowers from Saks, Yves Saint Laurent black sandals with red buckles from Paris, Maud Frizon purple shoes with spike heels. There are Docksiders, Tretorns, tennis shoes, and running shoes. Shoes from the L.L. Bean catalogue. Waders and black boots with walking heels. Frye boots, Bandolino gangster moll shoes with open toes in beige, black alligator sandals from Pappagallo purchased near the Spanish Steps.

I move on to the drawers. I open a drawer filled with Jim's underwear, and on his socks, on each pair of socks, his name is sewn carefully. I open the drawer of the night table, by the Sunbeam electric blanket dial and find spermicide, an applicator, and a diaphragm case, all in a little box. I close the drawer quickly when I hear footsteps enter the room.

Jim comes in and sees me standing in my towel, his closets and drawers opened. "You lost?"

"I was looking for a robe."

"Oh." He flings one at me, which I awkwardly slip on over my towel. "You staying for the weekend?"

I shake my head. "I've got a lot of work to do."

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Jim sits down at the edge of the bed. "You're never going to meet a guy, working so hard." Actually I don't work very hard, but I'm always on call. I work for a man who makes commercials. I'm the one who makes soap bubble, beer foam. I've been flown to Los Angeles to squeeze a tube of toothpaste.

"I've got a date tomorrow night." I blush, in defense of myself. "To go ice skating." Jim nods. "With an accountant." Jim smiles.

"Anything serious?" I shake my head. "Well, I hope it will be soon." He sighs wistfully as he walks toward the door. "Nothing like it when it is."

For dinner Alice has a turkey and a goose and two kinds of stuffing. She has sweet potatoes and cranberry sauce and creamed spinach and three pies and I don't know what else. Just before the guests arrive, Jim begins to carve. He puts a fork firmly into the turkey's back and brings the knife gently to the side. He brings the knife back and forth again while Alice holds out a platter. He carves smoothly and well and puts the meat carefully onto the platter that Alice is holding. They have worked up this act together. I watch as he brings the knife back and I can picture him in the act of love, moving with an even, steady stride.

Once when we were in college and I visited Alice, we all slept in the same room and I watched them making love. They thought I was asleep and Jim kept on saying to Alice over and over, "Is this all right? Do you like this?" And Alice said, "Shush, I'll die if you wake Jennie." But I'd been awake the entire time and I'd watched the way their bodies had moved.

The next night I go out with the accountant. We go to an outdoor skating rink and drink Irish coffee. During an Irish coffee, he says he knows if he's going to fall in love with a girl after talking with her for fifteen seconds. Since he and I have been talking for a few hours already, it doesn't seem that I'm a likely candidate. He takes me home, rolls a joint, and we make love rather foolishly. After he leaves, I think about Alice. How she has it all.

A few days later I go to a department store to buy sheets.

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My mother bought some sheets for me when I graduated from college and I've been sleeping in them ever since. Suddenly I can't stand the lack of texture. The way they feel polished like smooth stones.

I've never bought sheets before. Not for myself. I've bought other things since I graduated from college. Cross country skis and dresses for parties and trips to the South. But sheets and dishes and nightgowns, those things I bought for other people. For people who were going to be married. Suddenly I have to go and make those purchases.

The department store confuses me at first, so I go directly to the linen section. There's a white sale and I watch the women as they pick the packages up and squeeze them as if they're buying cantaloupe. A salesgirl, seeing me bewildered, comes up and offers to help. She's young with very white teeth and blonde hair that looks dyed. I tell her I want sheets for regular occasions, and sheets for special occasions. She gives me a knowing smile.

I buy bags full of purple and white flowered sheets. I buy beige sheets with lace sidings, a purple and white comforter cover and four down pillows. I spend more money on my sheets than I've ever spent on anything. Then I go home and make my bed. I put on the new and toss out the old. It is a Saturday night, so I go down the street and buy a newspaper. Then, even though it is early, I crawl into my bed. I can hear all kinds of sounds outside. Drunk people wandering home from parties, people having fights. Car doors opening, slamming shut. I open the paper and begin to read. The new sheets feel different from the old ones. They are crisp and they scratch a little as I try to sleep.

I call Alice on her birthday and say I want to come out and see her. She says there isn't going to be much of a party this year, just a few old friends are stopping by, but I can come if I want. She sounds distracted and I can hear Sara crying. When I get to her house, it's quiet and doesn't feel much like she's going to have a party. The house isn't decorated with balloons and paper streamers, and I can't find any chicken salad in the icebox. Buick lies lethargically in a corner, ignoring us all.

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Alice sits at the kitchen table for a few moments, sipping coffee. Then she asks me if I want to come down to the basement and help her with the laundry. I find it a little odd that Alice is doing the laundry on her birthday, when she's having a few friends over, but I don't see any reason not to help her.

We go downstairs; the basement is damp and cold. She has a washer and dryer and there are piles of laundry on the floor. There seems to be a ton of laundry. I've never seen so many clothes. There are sheets and towels and socks and gym clothes all mixed together. Colors lie with whites. To one side, there are more baskets of clothes, piles of shirts and socks, and they all look like they belong to a man. Alice picks up a handful. "These are Jim's," she says to me. I nod. I tell her I know. Plaid shirts and green pants. Sweats and a man's undershirt. She picks up a handful and stuffs them into my face. "Smell them," she says.

"What?" I step back in surprise.

"Go on," she says, "Smell them."

I smell them. They smell like a man's body. Like a man's sweat. And they smell like something else, but I can't figure it out. "They smell dirty," I say.

But Alice shakes her head. "Don't you smell anything else?" This time she separates some underwear from the rest of his clothes. She takes some underpants and shirts and stuffs these in my face. I breathe in deeply.

"They smell nice," I say dumbly.

"Perfume," Alice says. "French perfume, I think."

I nod, sniffing Jim's underpants, which she holds up to my nose. "Smells good."

Alice stuffs them into the washing machine. "I don't wear perfume." She puts in a plaid shirt with his underwear. "I'm allergic to it. My skin breaks out in hives." Alice takes a very large amount of soap and dumps it into the washing machine. "If I just put a tiny dot on my skin, I get a big blotch."

"Oh," I say. And then add, "I never knew that."

"That's why Mom never gives me perfume. When we were little and Mom would dab some on me, I'd break out. I think I react to the stuff that comes from whales. Maybe they don't get it from whales anymore. But I haven't tried it. I'm prob-

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ably not allergic to the synthetic thing they use. Anyway, the cause doesn't matter. What matters is I don't use perfume. I never have."

She bangs the door of the washer shut and begins removing things from the dryer. She takes out shirts and socks and puts them on top of the large folding table. She folds them and puts them in a basket. "When you live in a house for as long as I've lived in this one, you get to know the way it smells," Alice tells me. "I know when things are burning. I know when the cats piss on the rug." I help her fold.

"I washed everything," she goes on. "I must've washed everything in his closet a dozen times. I wanted to get rid of the smell and I wanted them to be clean before I packed them. I've packed most of them. This is all that's left." She begins to match some of his socks. "I even know who she is. She designs the little appliances. You know the minature electric fan? That was her brainstorm."

During her birthday party, Alice runs up and down the stairs with Jim's fresh laundry. Alice is normal with Jim. She hangs on his arm. Kisses him on the cheek. He keeps his arm tightly around her. And then after the party, when the guests are leaving, Jim goes to take his elderly aunt home. While he is gone, Alice and I put all of Jim's things into several suitcases. "Alice," I say, "Are you sure about this? I mean, shouldn't you think it out?"

She looks at me with a strange smile. "Don't you think I already have?" She takes a tag and puts it on a suitcase. We lug them out into the driveway and place them right where Jim would run over them if he came into the drive. The tag says, "Don't bother coming in." After we do that, we start to make dinner. We use all of Jim's appliances, every single one.

While we are making dinner, Jim pulls into the driveway. The car screeches to a halt; the door slams. We go to the window and see Jim, staring at his luggage. Alice turns away, but I watch him hurling the suitcases into the car.

That night I sleep in the back bedroom with Sara. I am tired, but for some reason I wake in the middle of the night. It is a bright moonlit night and the moonlight makes the snow a

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very silvery-blue. In the snow, I see Alice, walking Buick. She has him on a very long lead and she is walking him across the backyard. I think how beautiful it is, to see Alice walking Buick in the moonlight in the snow.

But then I think it's rather late to be walking a dog. And the dog doesn't seem to want to be walked at all. In fact, I can see the mark of his whole body in the snow, where he's been dragged. Buick is a fairly large dog and it's not easy to drag him, so Alice must be much stronger than she looks.

I watch for a few moments from the window to see where she's dragging him. She drags him to a tree that grows close to the ground in the backyard. I see her toss the lead over a branch. She tugs on the rope and Buick rises off the ground, struggling, now making a kind of yelping noise, those big, flat paws clawing at the air.

I run downstairs and pull on a pair of galoshes. In my nightgown, the cold slapping against my skin, I run out across the yard, shouting at Alice. I don't know what I'm saying, but I feel the impact of my body as it hits hers. We sail into the snow, like two great football players in some incomplete play. Buick goes yelping off across the yard. We are both in nightgowns, and the snow goes right to our skin. Our nightgowns lift up. In the cold snow our bodies come together. Alice rolls on top of me and tries to smash my head into the snow. I turn her over and hold her down.

Alice shouts at me how he's a mean, nasty dog and how she'll just have to give him back to the kennel. She says how they'll just put him to sleep. I press my arms on her wrists, my knees into her legs. I feel the warmth of her thighs against my thighs in the snow. It is a strange feeling; we are both hot and cold at the same time. "I hate you," I tell her. "I always have."

After I say it, I let her go. I get up and shake the snow off me. She shakes the snow off herself. We stand there together shivering. For a moment we stare at each other. "I didn't mean that," I say. "I just always thought you had it all." And then she grabs me. I think she is going to strangle me and I struggle to get away, but instead she presses me to her and sobs. I hold Alice, broken, cold as winter, whiskey-breathed, with snot drops

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frozen to her nostrils. I lift up the hem of my nightgown and bring it to her face.

I take her upstairs and we put on dry nightgowns. I crawl into bed and wrap my arms around her. The dog curls foolishly on the floor, his memory obliterated. The moon shines a path into the room, and outside I see the snow. It is that Midwestern winter I know so well. Pristine, all just right, the moonlight, the crackling noises, the snow crashing from the trees then sounding like the footsteps of small animals traveling across the roof. From the bed I see icicles hanging from the roof. I want to break one off and suck on it, but Alice is falling asleep in my arms.

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Portfolio

Drawings

M. Louise Stanley

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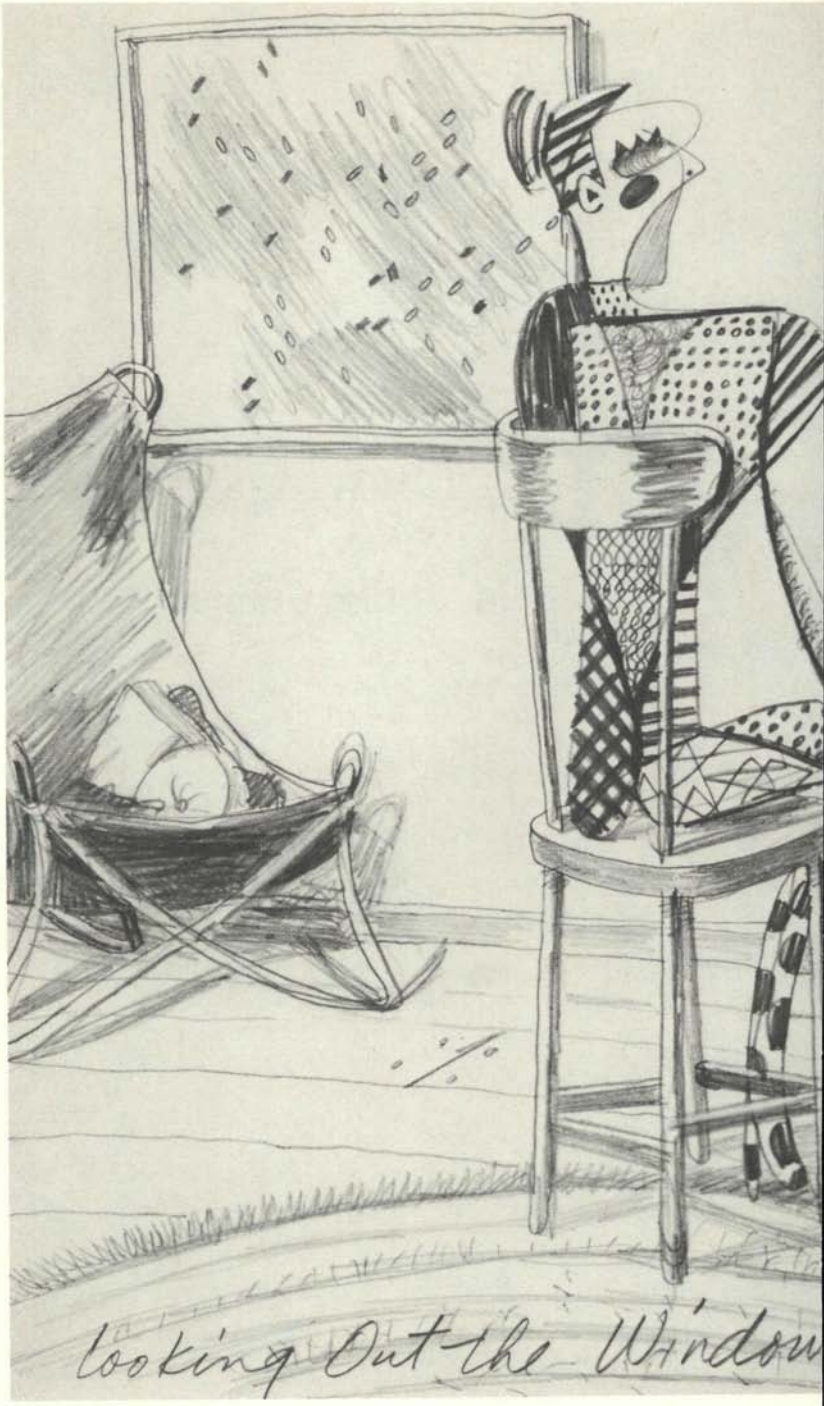

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Looking Out the Window Abstractly

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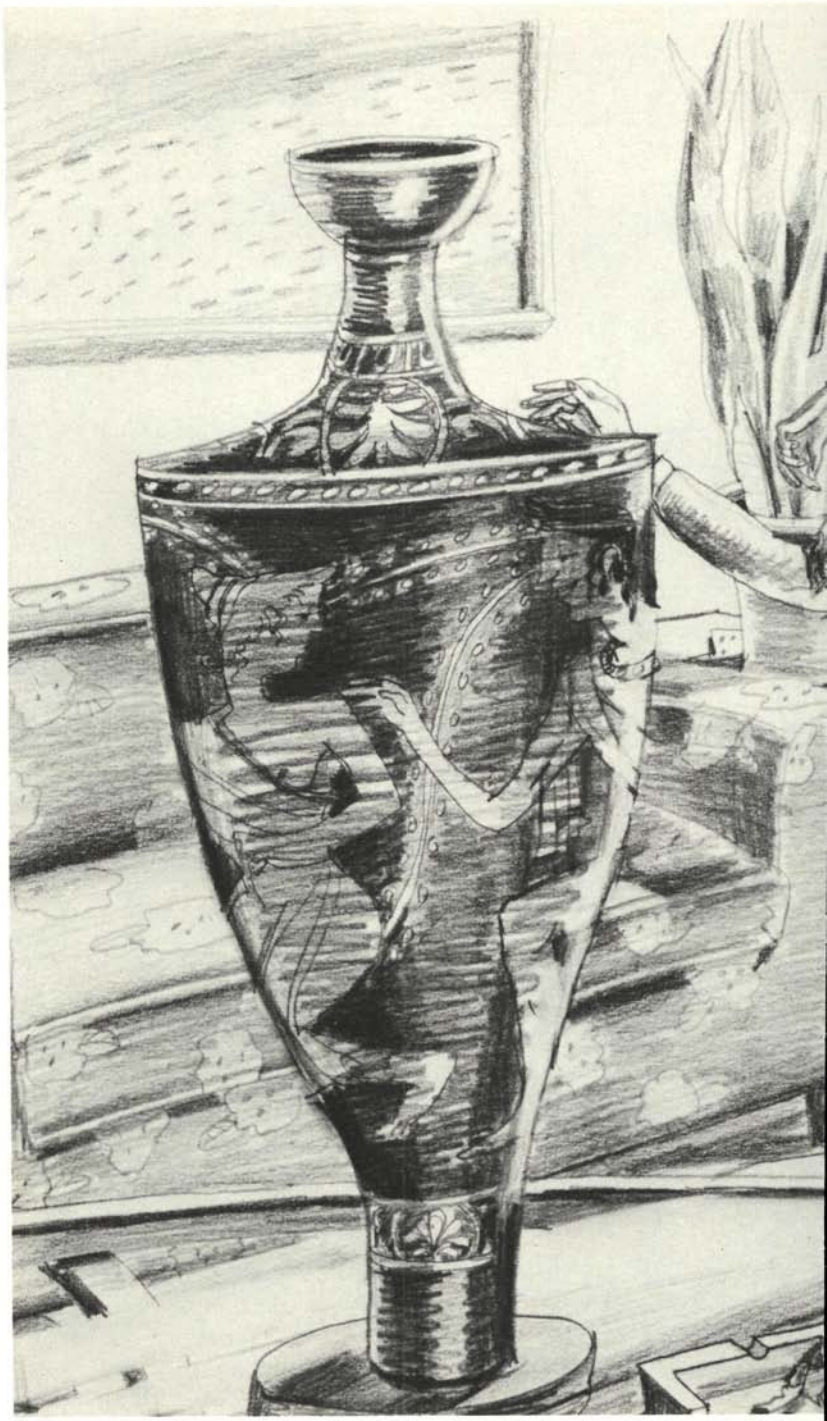

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Homage to Keats

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Two Alternatives

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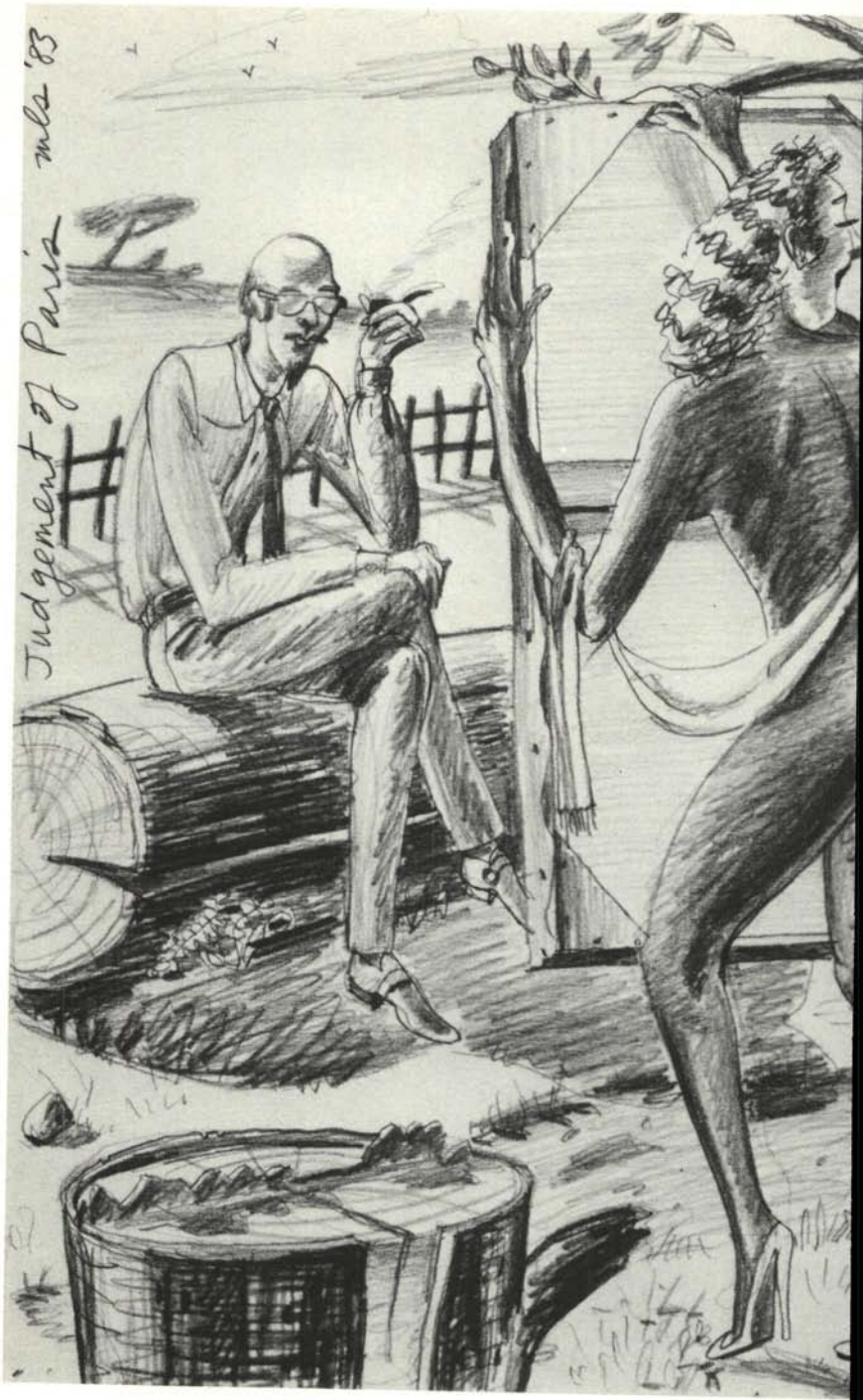

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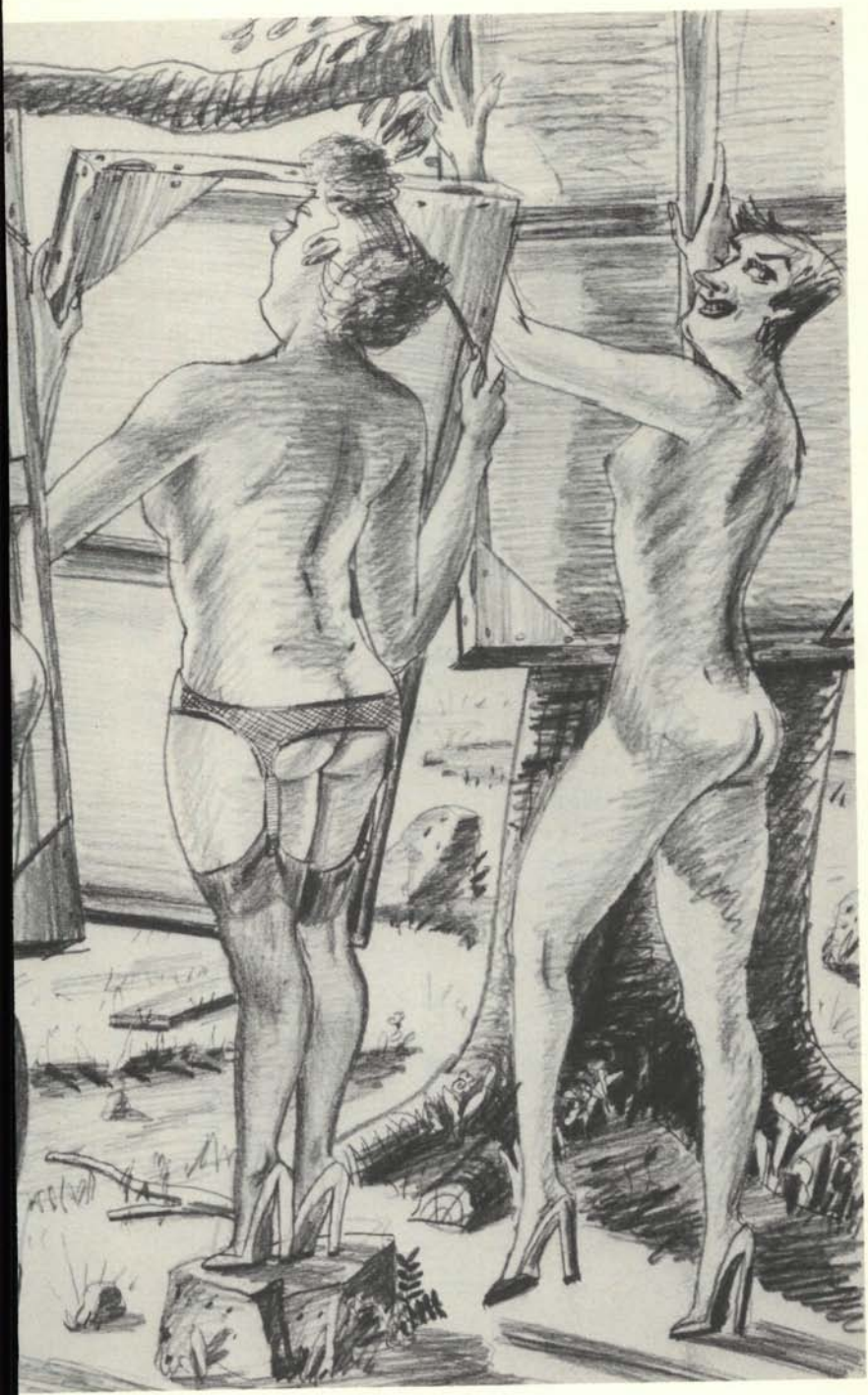

Judgement of Paris

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Empire of the Sun (1)

The Eve of Pearl Harbor

= Chap 1 =

Rivers came early to Shanghai, overtaking each other like the tides that raced up the Yangtze and returned to this gaudy city all the coffins cast adrift from the funeral piers of the Chinese Bund.

[Jim had begun to dream of wars. At night the same silent fatal scene seemed to flicker against the wall of his bedroom in Amherst Avenue, and transformed his sleeping

A draft of the first page of J. G. Ballard's recent novel, Empire of the Sun.

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The Art of Fiction LXXXV

J. G. Ballard

The son of an English businessman, J. G. Ballard was born and raised in Shanghai. For the past twenty-odd years, he has lived more or less anonymously in Shepperton, a dingy, nondescript suburb of London lying under the approach to Heathrow Airport. Ballard's writing is so often situated within the erotic, technical, postholocaust landscape, and so often concerned with the further reaches of postmodern consciousness, that it is inevitably rather droll to come upon the man himself. On first meeting, Ballard is standing somewhat shyly in the doorway of a modest two-story dwelling similar to all the

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others on the block; one would take him as a typical suburban lord of the manor. He is wearing a brown sweater over his shirt, protected against the faint chill of a summer afternoon.

Inside, two shiny silver palm trees, bending amiably over a reclining aluminum lawn chair, inject the only note of fantasy into an otherwise quite normal-looking household. Until a few years ago, Ballard, a widower, raised his three children here as a single parent.

We sit down in his study, which appears to have once been the living room. Ballard works at an old dining table against the wall, upon which sits his middle-aged typewriter, surrounded by fairly tidy stacks of letters, books, and papers. The bookshelves are overflowing, packed every-which-way with an odd collection, including a thick, illustrated anatomy text called Crash Injuries, *the complete Warren Commission Report, the collected works of Shakespeare, and many books on surrealism, Dadaism, futurism, and pop art.*

An extremely articulate and wide-ranging conversationalist, Ballard expresses his ideas, speculations, and concerns with considerable force. A serious sense of humor is also evident, and one often has the feeling that he is continually amused, or at least bemused, by the sheer fact of existence.

At the time of this interview, Ballard had just finished the first draft of his latest novel, Empire of the Sun, *which was published in October, 1984, to great acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic. "It's my first good review in the States in fifteen years," comments Ballard, referring to the generally indifferent reception his books have received here to date. This is a situation which has long been puzzling to Ballard, who consciously draws on specifically American iconography in much of his work. Yet, within just a few weeks of publication,* Empire of the Sun *has already become his most commercially successful work. This "non-fiction" novel—a great departure in subject matter for Ballard—details his own adolescent experiences, first in war-formed Shanghai as the son of a British merchant, then, after Pearl Harbor, as a fugitive-then-prisoner-of-war in the Lunghua Assembly Center. "I assume*

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that it took me a long time to forget, and then a long time to remember," Ballard recently told an interviewer who asked why he had only now attempted this reconstruction.

After an hour or so of talk, Teacher's scotch and sodas are served, and Ballard discourses briefly on the virtues of Shepperton water (several low-lying reservoirs are nearby). While the sun is setting in the shady green backyard, visible through French windows, a moment of suburban quiet prevails. "I don't know why I ended up here, really. . . ." Ballard comments, "Actually, the suburbs are far more sinister places than most city dwellers imagine. Their very blandness forces the imagination into new areas. I mean, one's got to get up in the morning thinking of a deviant act, merely to make certain of one's freedom. It needn't be much; kicking the dog will do."

INTERVIEWER

Are you ready to risk the fate of the centipede, who, when asked exactly how he crawled, shot himself?

J. G. BALLARD

I'll do my best to examine my hands in the mirror.

INTERVIEWER

So, how do you write, exactly?

BALLARD

Actually, there's no secret. One simply pulls the cork out of the bottle, waits three minutes, and two thousand or more years of Scottish craftsmanship does the rest.

INTERVIEWER

Let's start with obsession. You seem to have an obsessive way of repeatedly playing out permutations of a certain set of emblems and concerns. Things like the winding down of time, car crashes, birds and flying, drained swimming pools, airports, abandoned buildings, Ronald Reagan . . .

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BALLARD

I think you're completely right. I would say that I quite consciously rely on my obsessions in all my work, that I deliberately set up an obsessional frame of mind. In a paradoxical way, this leaves one free of the subject of the obsession. It's like picking up an ashtray and staring so hard at it that one becomes obsessed by its contours, angles, texture, et cetera, and forgets that it is an ashtray—a glass dish for stubbing out cigarettes.

INTERVIEWER

So you rely on the magnetism of an obsession as a way of proceeding?

BALLARD

Yes, so the unity of the enterprise is forever there. A whole universe can be bounded in a nutshell. Of course, why one chooses certain topics as the subject for one's obsessions is a different matter. Why was I obsessed by car crashes? It's such a peculiar idea.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, why were you?

BALLARD

Presumably all obsessions are extreme metaphors waiting to be born. That whole private mythology, in which I believe totally, is a collaboration between one's conscious mind and those obsessions that, one by one, present themselves as stepping stones.

INTERVIEWER

Your work does at times seem to possess a sort of prophetic quality. Are you aware of this as you write?

BALLARD

It's true that I have very little idea what I shall be writing next, but at the same time I have a powerful premonition of everything that lies ahead of me, even ten years ahead. I don't

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mean anything too portentous by this. I suppose people—certainly imaginative writers—who consciously exploit their own obsessions do so in part because those obsessions lie like stepping stones in front of them, and their feet are drawn towards them. At any given time, I'm aware that my mind and imagination are setting towards a particular compass point, that the whole edifice is preparing itself to lean in one way, like a great ramshackle barn.

INTERVIEWER

Has this manipulation of your obsessions come to feel at all mechanical over the years?

BALLARD

I do exploit myself in a calculated way, but there again one has to remember the old joke about the laboratory rat who said, "I have this scientist trained—every time I press this lever he gives me a pellet of food."

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps it's a symbiotic relationship.

BALLARD

I take for granted that for the imaginative writer, the exercise of the imagination is part of the basic process of coping with reality, just as actors need to act all the time to make up for some deficiency in their sense of themselves. Years ago, sitting at the café outside the American Express building in Athens, I watched the British actor Michael Redgrave (father of Vanessa) cross the street in the lunchtime crowd, buy *Time* at a magazine kiosk, indulge in brief banter with the owner, sit down, order a drink, then get up and walk away—every moment of which, every gesture, was clearly *acted*, that is, stressed and exaggerated in a self-conscious way, although he obviously thought that no one was aware who he was, and he didn't think that anyone was watching him. I take it that the same process works for the writer, except that the writer is assigning himself his own roles. I have a sense of certain gathering obsessions and

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roles, certain corners of the field where the next stage of the hunt will be carried on. I know that if I don't write, say on holiday, I begin to feel unsettled and uneasy, as I gather people do who are not allowed to dream.

INTERVIEWER

I believe I once read—perhaps it was in connection with the *Vermilion Sands* collection—that you actually enjoyed the notion of cultural decadence.

BALLARD

Decadence? I can't remember if I ever said I enjoyed the notion, except in the sense of drained swimming pools and abandoned hotels, which I don't really see as places of decadence, but rather like the desert in that I see them merely as psychic zero stations, or as "Go," in Monopoly terms.

INTERVIEWER

But drained swimming pools, abandoned hotels—aren't you inviting the worst sort of psychoanalytic interpretation?

BALLARD

Ah, drained swimming pools! There's a mystery I never want to penetrate—not that it's of interest to anyone else. I'm never happier than when I can write about drained swimming pools and abandoned hotels. But I'm not sure if that's decadence or simply an attempt to invert and reverse the commonplace, to turn the sock inside out. I've always been intrigued by inversions of that kind, or any kind. I think that's what drew me to an interest in anatomy.

INTERVIEWER

The current notion of decadence is that it's merely a kind of guilty pleasure.

BALLARD

The guilty pleasure notion isn't to be discounted either, the idea of pursuing an obsession, like the black theme in Joris-

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Karl Huysmans's *A Rebours*, to a point where it is held together and justified only by aesthetic or notional considerations, beyond any moral restraints. A large part of life takes place in that zone, anyway.

INTERVIEWER

Like many novelists, you first studied medicine. Is that where you thought your future lay at the time?

BALLARD

Medicine was certainly intended to be a career. I wanted to become a psychiatrist, an adolescent ambition which, of course, is fulfilled by many psychiatrists. The doctor/psychiatrist figures in my writing are alter egos of a kind, what I would have been had I not become a writer—a personal fantasy that I've fed into my fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Your work also seems tremendously influenced by the visual arts.

BALLARD

Yes, sometimes I think that all my writing is nothing more than the compensatory work of a frustrated painter.

INTERVIEWER

You've written about Salvador Dali and Max Ernst, and in particular the surrealists seem to have fired your imagination the most.

BALLARD

Yes, the surrealists have been a tremendous influence on me, though, strictly speaking, corroboration is the right word. The surrealists show how the world can be remade by the mind. In Odilon Redon's phrase, they place the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible. They've certainly played a very large part in my life, far more so than any other writer I know.

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INTERVIEWER

How did this interest arise? Were you taken to museums as a child?

BALLARD

It has always puzzled me, because there were no museums in the Shanghai where I was brought up.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps Shanghai itself was a kind of museum?

BALLARD

I assume that I looked back on Shanghai and the war there as if it were part of some huge nightmare tableau that revealed itself in a violent and gaudy way . . . that remade world that one finds in surrealism. Perhaps I've always been trying to return to the Shanghai landscape, to some sort of truth that I glimpsed there. I think that in all my fiction, I've used the techniques of surrealism to remake the present into something at least consonant with the past.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps we can talk a bit about the spiritual mechanics of writing. At this point in your career, you must have evolved a generally clear sense of what the whole process of writing a novel is like.

BALLARD

Writing a novel is one of those modern rites of passage, I think, that lead us from an innocent world of contentment, drunkenness, and good humor, to a state of chronic edginess and the perpetual scanning of bank statements. By the eighteenth book, one has a sense of having bricked oneself into a niche, a roosting place for other people's pigeons. I wouldn't recommend it.

INTERVIEWER

How does a book take shape for you?

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BALLARD

That's a vast topic, and, to be honest, one I barely understand. Even in the case of a naturalistic writer, who in a sense takes his subject matter directly from the world around him, it's difficult enough to understand how a particular fiction imposes itself. But in the case of an imaginative writer, especially one like myself with strong affinities to the surrealists, I'm barely aware of what is going on. Recurrent ideas assemble themselves, obsessions solidify themselves, one generates a set of working mythologies, like tales of gold invented to inspire a crew. I assume one is dealing with a process very close to that of dreams, a set of scenarios devised to make sense of apparently irreconcilable ideas. Just as the optical centers of the brain construct a wholly artificial three-dimensional universe through which we can move effectively, so the mind as a whole creates an imaginary world that satisfactorily explains everything, as long as it is constantly updated. So the stream of novels and stories continues. . . .

INTERVIEWER

So it's more or less a continuous process?

BALLARD

Yes. Presumably, all along one is writing the same book. I'm just finishing the second draft of the China book, and although it's a radical departure in subject matter, the way it shaped itself for me and the process of writing it have been no different from anything else I've written.

INTERVIEWER

I'm curious to know how material from the "real world" comes to be incorporated into the rather enclosed spaces of books such as *High-Rise*, *Crash*, or *Concrete Island*.

BALLARD

Well, before starting *Crash*, for example, in 1969, I staged an exhibition of crashed cars at the New Arts Laboratory in London—three crashed cars in a formal gallery ambience. The

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centerpiece was a crashed Pontiac from the last great tail-fin period. The whole exhibition illustrated a scene from my previous book, *Atrocity Exhibition*,* where my Travis hero stages a similarly despairing exhibition. What I was doing was testing my own hypotheses about the ambiguities that surround the car crash, ambiguities that are at the heart of the book. I hired a topless girl to interview people on closed circuit TV. The violent and overexcited reaction of the guests at the opening party was a deliberate imaginative overload which I imposed upon them in order to test my own obsession. The subsequent damage inflicted on the cars during the month of the show—people splashed them with paint, tore off the wing mirrors—and at the opening party, where the topless girl was almost raped in the rear seat of the Pontiac (a scene straight from *Crash* itself), convinced me I should write *Crash*. The girl later wrote a damningly hostile review of the show in an underground paper.

INTERVIEWER

You remarked in an interview some years ago that you yourself consider *Crash* a corrupting book.

BALLARD

I haven't read it for ten years. That interview must have taken place in '73 or '74, when *Crash* and *Atrocity Exhibition* were very much in mind. I've long since moved on to more serene meadows. It's interesting to step, for a moment, into the time machine. Those were heady days, all right, when the sixties were a vivid yesterday, not a vanished epoch. As I remarked just last night to my girlfriend, how dull by comparison seem one's present concerns. *Crash* a corrupting book? I'll take my younger self's word for it.

INTERVIEWER

Could one think of that kind of writing as a sort of "cultural acupuncture"?

* *Atrocity Exhibition* is published in the States as *Love and Napalm: Export USA* (Grove Press).

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BALLARD

I don't know. I don't care for the notion of the safety valve, that the sight of a few Christians being devoured by the lions sends us home in a happier state of mind. I certainly do believe that we should immerse ourselves in the destructive element. Far better to do so consciously than find ourselves tossed into the pool when we're not looking.

INTERVIEWER

Especially if it's been drained. Do you have any other examples of this sort of research?

BALLARD

Generally, the imaginative hypothesis is tested within the four corners of my own head, though I'm always keen to see my hunches confirmed. Before starting *High-Rise*, I was staying one summer in a beach high-rise at Rosas on the Costa Brava, not far from Dali's home at Port Lligat, and I noticed that one of the French ground-floor tenants, driven to a fury by cigarette butts thrown down from the upper floors, began to patrol the beach and photograph the offenders with a zoom lens. He then pinned the photos to a notice board in the foyer of the block. A very curious exhibition, which I took to be another green light to my imagination.

INTERVIEWER

Do you map out your way with any kind of outline or notes before you begin?

BALLARD

Yes, always. With short stories I do a brief synopsis of about a page, and only if I feel the story works as a story, as a dramatic narrative with the right shape and balance to grip the reader's imagination, do I begin to write it. Even in the *Atrocity Exhibition* pieces, there are strong stories embedded in the apparent confusion. There's even the faint trace of a story in "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan," and the other sections at the end of the book. In the case of the novels, the synopsis is much longer.

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For *High-Rise*, it was about 25,000 words, written in the form of a social worker's report on the strange events that had taken place in this apartment block, an extended case history. I wish I'd kept it; I think it was better than the novel. In the case of *The Unlimited Dream Company*, I spent a full year writing a synopsis that was eventually about 70,000 words long, longer than the eventual novel. In fact, I was cutting down and pruning the synopsis as I wrote the novel. By synopsis I don't mean a rough draft, but a running narrative in the perfect tense with the dialogue in reported speech, and with an absence of reflective passages and editorializing.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work on more than one project at a time?

BALLARD

I've never worked on more than one novel at a time, though I often break step and write a short story if I'm asked to by magazine editors I know. But! I only write them in the evenings or weekends, so that the imaginative continuity and commitment to the novel are unbroken.

INTERVIEWER

What are your daily working habits like?

BALLARD

Every day, five days a week. Longhand now, it's less tiring than a typewriter. When I'm writing a novel or story I set myself a target of about seven hundred words a day, sometimes a little more. I do a first draft in longhand, then do a very careful longhand revision of the text, then type out the final manuscript. I used to type first and revise in longhand, but I find that modern fiber-tip pens are less effort than a typewriter. Perhaps I ought to try a seventeenth-century quill. I rewrite a great deal, so the word processor sounds like my dream. My neighbor is a BBC videotape editor and he offered to lend me his, but apart from the eye-aching glimmer, I found that the editing functions are terribly laborious. I'm told that already one can see the differ-

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ence between fiction composed on the word processor and that on the typewriter. The word processor lends itself to a text that has great polish and clarity on a sentence-by-sentence and paragraph level, but has haywire overall chapter-by-chapter construction, because it's almost impossible to rifle through and do a quick scan of, say, twenty pages. Or so they say.

INTERVIEWER

How many hours a day do you put in at the desk?

BALLARD

Two hours in the late morning, two in the early afternoon, followed by a walk along the river to think over the next day. Then at six, scotch and soda, and oblivion.

INTERVIEWER

That sounds like the schedule of an efficient worker.

BALLARD

Well, concentration has never been a problem, and now there are few distractions. I assume that it is not entirely coincidental that, to the despair of my friends, I live in this remote backwater seventeen miles from London, in a small town where I know almost no one. However, until five years ago I had three adolescent children here, and not much more than ten years ago, at the time I was writing *Crash*, I was still driving them to school, collecting them, and getting totally involved in the hurly-burly of family life as a single parent. My wife died from galloping pneumonia while we were in Spain. But even in those days I kept the same hours, though then I stopped drinking at about the time I now start. At the time I wrote *Crystal World*, and through the five years of *Atrocity Exhibition*, I used to start the working day once I returned from delivering the children to school, at 9:30 in the morning, with a large scotch. It separated me from the domestic world, like a huge dose of Novocaine injected into reality in the same way that a dentist calms a fractious patient so that he can get on with some fancy bridgework.

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INTERVIEWER

What about your children? Have they been sources of anything that has gone into your fiction?

BALLARD

My children are in their mid-twenties, my son in computing, one daughter in the fine arts, the other in the BBC. They haven't figured at all in my work, which is curious, as I've lived so closely to them for so many years and they were more important to me than my fiction. Presumably the sources of my imagination, at least, run back to a world beyond my adulthood.

INTERVIEWER

Are you a note-taker? Before the synopsis, do you jot things down, experiment?

BALLARD

Yes, if I'm not working, I talk over ideas to myself on the machine, by which I mean I type out little ideas, let my mind wander. I generally begin a book with a large sheaf of notes, covering everything from the main themes to the details of the setting, the principal characters, et cetera, all of which I've daily speculated upon in the months before I begin. I'm already doing so now for what may be my next novel. I've never had a creative block, touch wood. I've never had any problems stimulating my imagination. Rather the opposite. At times, I need to damp it down.

INTERVIEWER

It sounds as though you're constantly working. Do you rest between books?

BALLARD

I don't really think of it like that. Usually, as at present, as I finish one novel the idea for the next is there—even if as no more than a small piece of grit—and within six months or so, I will be ready to start work on it. But during that period, the work's steadily gathering material to itself, and that probably represents the main effort of imagination I will make.

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INTERVIEWER

Speaking of stimulation, did any of the psychoactive drugs of the sixties give you any clues for your writing?

BALLARD

I suppose I'm a medium-to-heavy drinker, but I haven't taken any drugs since one terrifying LSD trip in 1967. A nightmarish mistake. It opened a vent of hell that took years to close and left me wary even of aspirin. Visually it was just like my 1965 novel, *The Crystal World*, which some people think was inspired by my LSD trip. It convinced me that a powerful and obsessive enough imagination can reach, unaided, the very deepest layers of the mind. (I take it that beyond LSD there lies nothing.) Imagination is the shortest route between any two conceivable points, and more than equal to any physical rearrangement of the brain's functions.

INTERVIEWER

Back in the sixties, Martin Bax and yourself, as editors of *Ambit* magazine, ran a drug competition.

BALLARD

Dr. Bax and I ran a competition in *Ambit* for the best prose or poetry written under the influence of drugs, and it produced a lot of interesting material. In general, *cannabis* was the best stimulant, though some good pieces came out of LSD. In fact, the best writing of all was done by Ann Quin, under the influence of the contraceptive pill.

INTERVIEWER

Dr. Bax is a novelist as well, isn't he?

BALLARD

Martin is a physician, a research pediatrician, and consultant to a London hospital, and his book *The Hospital Ship* (published in the States by New Directions) is the most remarkable and original novel I've come across since reading William Burroughs.

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INTERVIEWER

Burroughs wrote an eccentric and laudatory, in its way, introduction to the American edition of *Atrocity Exhibition*. Do you know him?

BALLARD

Burroughs, of course, I admire to the other side of idolatry, starting with *Naked Lunch*, then *Ticket*, *Soft Machine*, and *Nova Express*. I'm less keen on his later books. In his way he's a genius. It's a pity that his association with drugs and homosexuality has made him a counterculture figure, but I suppose his real links are with Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and the Beats. Still, I think he's much more of an establishment figure, like Dean Swift, with a despairing disgust for the political and professional establishments of which he is a part. I have met Burroughs quite a few times over the last fifteen years, and he always strikes me as an upper-class midwesterner, with an inherent superior attitude towards blacks, policemen, doctors, and small town politicians, the same superior attitude that Swift had to their equivalents in his own day, the same scatological obsessions and brooding contempt for middle-class values, thrift, hard work, parenthood, et cetera, which are just excuses for petit-bourgeois greed and exploitation. But I admire Burroughs more than any other living writer, and most of those who are dead. It's nothing to do with his homosexual bent, by the way. I'm no member of the "homintern," but a lifelong straight who prefers the company of women to most men. The few homosexual elements in *Crash* and *Atrocity Exhibition*, fucking Reagan, et cetera, are there for reasons other than the sexual—in fact, to show a world beyond sexuality, or, at least beyond clear sexual gender.

INTERVIEWER

How long does a novel generally take you?

BALLARD

Most have taken a year to eighteen months. *Crash* took two and a half years, as did *The Unlimited Dream Company*; the first because it was a continuing moral challenge—I had three

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young children who were endlessly crossing the road, and still are—the second because it was imaginatively exhausting, a real set of balancing acts.

INTERVIEWER

Do your titles spring naturally out of the work for you, or do you have to hunt for them?

BALLARD

Titles do tend to suggest themselves without being looked for, though in retrospect I feel one or two were mistakes. *The Unlimited Dream Company*, for example, sounds like a jeans emporium. There were also some titles that were strongly urged by the publisher against my better judgment; *Up* was my title for *High-Rise*. I often wrote short stories around titles that intrigued me, though I'm sure I would have written the stories anyway. One title, *Venus Smiles*, inspired me to write a short story, but when it was published I found the editor had changed the title to something else. So I wrote another story with that title.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever get well along and find you have to abandon something? And what's your approach to revision?

BALLARD

I've never aborted or abandoned anything, perhaps because everything I've written has been well-prepared in my mind. I write the complete first draft before returning to the beginning, though of course I'm working from a fairly detailed synopsis, so I'm sure of my overall structure. I then do a fair amount of cutting of superfluous phrases, occasionally of paragraphs or pages. Each book is written consecutively, as read, never out of order. I think that the use of the synopsis reflects, for me, a strong belief in the importance of the *story*, of the objective nature of the invented world I describe, of the complete separation of that world from my own mind. It's an old-fashioned standpoint (or seems to be, though I would argue vigorously

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that it isn't) and one that obviously separates me from the whole post-modernist notion of a reflexive, self-conscious fiction that explicitly acknowledges the inseparability of author and text. I regard that whole postmodernist notion as a tiresome *cul de sac*, from which any writer with a strong imagination, or any sense of moral urgency towards his subject matter, would burst forth with immense relief. Of course, I accept that an imaginative writer, like a figurative painter, takes for granted perspective, illusionist space, the unlimited depth of the picture plane, and that with the more extreme types of imagination, such as the surrealists (or myself), a double piece of illusionism is called for—one is asked to accept not only the illusionist space of the picture plane or the narrative text, but the strange events going on within that illusory space. Curious to say, the human mind seems to have not the slightest difficulty in doing this, and even seems designed to work that way, at least, if dreams, myths, and legends are any guide. The notion put about by deconstructionist critics—who I hear are all the rage in the States—that there is no difference between a bus ticket and, say, Mr. Micawber, that both equally are fictions, seems to me to miss the point that we can't think about Mr. Micawber at all without making just that old-fashioned imaginative leap that the deconstructionists are working so hard to dismantle.

INTERVIEWER

Aside from your adolescent dream of becoming a psychiatrist, do you have any other pet daydreams about other lives, other careers?

BALLARD

I haven't really had any private fantasies about an alternative life, even in the daydream sense. I rather like the idea of ending my days drinking myself to death on a mountainside in Mexico. I went to the same school as Malcolm Lowry, The Leys in Cambridge, and curiously enough, in September, 1939, while waiting with my parents for a boat back across the Pacific to Shanghai, I lived in a rented flat on the same shoreline near

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Vancouver and Victoria Island where he had his shack—we stayed a couple of months at a time while he was there. His father came from the same Manchester cotton industry background as mine. Bigger mythologies have been built on smaller grounds.

INTERVIEWER

Were the classics big among your studies?

BALLARD

Yes, Latin was very important. I was still doing subsidiary Latin when I read English for a year at London University, after ending my medical studies at Cambridge—from one set of Latin tags to another. At school—The Leys—we even attempted Latin conversation. We all agreed that we would far rather take the Latin oral than the French oral, which we detested.

INTERVIEWER

You had a succession of jobs and were late in becoming a full-time writer. How did you make that transition?

BALLARD

My first novel, *The Wind From Nowhere*, was a hack job written in a fortnight to allow me to make the break into full-time writing. I worked full-time as deputy editor of a scientific journal until I was thirty-two or thirty-three, and I felt that I needed to give up journalism in order to have the time to work on a more serious novel. Luckily, that happened.

INTERVIEWER

Your work has been very well received by critics, but you've had a rough time with publishers in the United States—even though we seem to be in the midst of a science fiction boom.

BALLARD

My own work has nothing in common with Star Wars or Star Trek, and not much, in a real sense, with written American science fiction, which has veered away into out-and-out escapist fantasy. I don't bring "Good News" . . . though actually I think

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I do—for me, *Crash* is a novel with a happy ending. But there's very little my agent or I can do about my work not being in print in the States. Perhaps the economics of U.S. publishing necessitate a larger hardback sale in the short term than my rather quirky fiction can manage. The same is true for paperback. I *was* published and in print in the States throughout the sixties. I've always tried to be as internationalist as possible, to get away from the parochial view of things summed up in that London Times headline fifty years ago or so: "FOG IN CHANNEL—CONTINENT ISOLATED." Actually, almost my entire output of eighteen books has been published, reissued and retranslated in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan, and Holland, and it's those countries—all (except Japan) far closer to here than Los Angeles and San Francisco are to you on the eastern seaboard—which give me my sense of a readership. I think there's no doubt that a new European sensibility is growing, particularly among the college-student young who have grown up in the western European auto-route and high-rise culture of the past fifteen years. They see certain political concerns in my fiction which Americans miss. Perhaps, too, there is a certain amount of fog around Manhattan island. I regret that I haven't had more success in the States, but the Atlantic is very much wider than it was twenty years ago. I sometimes feel that to have a novel accepted in the States again means I will have to write about a bushy-tailed mammal who joins a nature commune and falls in love with a tree. In fact, you and a very nice teenager in New York may well be my only two readers in the States, the way things are going there. Perhaps I should introduce you?

INTERVIEWER

Your books are imported by the specialty shops, though they're damnably expensive. The last time I bought one, it was pulled out from behind the counter.

BALLARD

Remaindered copies, under the counter—the next step down the spiral is *samizdat*, I suppose; a few bundles of grubby type-

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script will circulate in a clandestine fashion, rooted out one by one by the thought-police of the New York publishers. Of course, I'm joking . . . or am I?

INTERVIEWER

Could you say more about this new European sensibility?

BALLARD

The young people of western Europe since the sixties have grown up in a remarkably uniform environment, both in terms of the postwar architecture of high-rises and motorways and shopping malls, and also in terms of fashion in clothes and pop music, beach holidays in Spain and Greece, and their attitudes to society as a whole and their place in it—to the place of Europe between the two superpowers (both of whom, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., are tolerated but not trusted). I think for the first time in western Europe, one sees a generation which finds itself living in sane, just, and largely humane societies—the welfare-state social democracies west of the iron curtain—and is *deeply suspicious* of them, while in fact sharing all the values for which those societies stand. Young people who take for granted that the state will provide free university education, free medical treatment, and prosperous consumer-goods economies, but who nonetheless seem to suspect that behind all this lies some unseen conspiracy. One sees the most extreme example in the Baader-Meinhof group in West Germany, whose terrorist acts seem totally meaningless and irrational. But, of course, that is the very point of those acts—in a totally sane society, madness is the only freedom. I think a lot of my own fiction—*Atrocity Exhibition*, *Crash*, *High-Rise*, for example—taps these feelings of paranoia and desperation. As well, there are all the enormous institutionalized divisions between the social classes, between the meritocratic elites and those on the dole who will never work again, between those making their way into the Silicon Valleys of the future and those left behind in the dead end of the twentieth century. A lot of the youngsters who come to see me and talk about *Atrocity Exhibition* see it as a political work. To them, the voracious media landscape I describe is a machine for political exploitation.

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INTERVIEWER

I know at one time you put together some collage-texts. As a frustrated painter, are you ever tempted to work more visually, in film or television, for instance?

BALLARD

I have, in fact, done a little work in film and television, but nothing I would really recommend to you.

INTERVIEWER

How about aleatory methods, à la Burroughs? There was a drawing of you in *Ambit* magazine in which I noticed a pair of scissors on the front of your desk.

BALLARD

The artist requested those scissors in order to cut up his sheets of paper. He then placed them on the desk and incorporated them into the drawing. On the whole, no. I need to rework my material to too great an extent to allow intact foundpieces to appear. However, as in Dali's paintings, there are more elements of collage than might meet the eye at first glance. A large amount of documentary material finds its way into my fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Can you give me some examples?

BALLARD

Well, certainly *Atrocity Exhibition*, where I adopt a style of pseudoscientific reportage closely based on similar scientific papers. And there's the piece "Theatre of War," in *Myths of the Near Future*, where all the dialogue except for the commentator's is taken from Viet Nam newsreel transcripts. There is a scene in *Concrete Island* where the girl Jane Shepherd is berating Maitland. That is a transcript of a secret tape recording I made of my then-girlfriend in a rage—well, secret is the wrong word; she was simply too angry to notice that I had switched the machine on.

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INTERVIEWER

What about the piece "The Generations of America," which consists entirely of a list of names, connected alternately by the words "and" and "shot"—as opposed to "begat"?

BALLARD

Lists are fascinating; one could almost do a list novel. Those names were taken from the editorial mastheads of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Fortune*—that was part of the joke, of course, as the first two publications played a large role in the sensationalizing of violent death and assassination that I described.

INTERVIEWER

Given that a certain center of your work's themes and imagery lies in the events and personalities of the sixties, and given that your work was more available in the States then than now, what would you say were the major alterations in the Zeitgeist?

BALLARD

I'm not sure I have anything to add to what everyone has been saying for years. The sixties were a time of endlessly multiplying possibilities, of real selflessness in many ways, a huge network of connections between Viet Nam and the space race, psychedelia and pop music, linked together in every conceivable way by the media landscape. We were all living inside an enormous novel, an electronic novel, governed by instantaneity. In many ways, time didn't exist in the sixties, just a set of endlessly proliferating presents. Time returned in the seventies, but not a sense of the future. The hands of the clock now go nowhere. Still, I've hated nostalgia, and it may be that a similar hot mix will occur again. On the other hand, being quite serious, the future may be boring. It's possible that my children and yours will live in an eventless world, and that the faculty of imagination will die, or express itself solely in the realm of psychopathology. In *Atrocity Exhibition* I make the point that perhaps psychopathology should be kept alive as a repository, probably the last repository, of the imagination.

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INTERVIEWER

Speaking of the media landscape, you don't seem to mention music very much. What do you listen to?

BALLARD

I think I'm the only person I know who doesn't own a record player or a single record. I've never understood why, because my maternal grandparents were lifelong teachers of music, and my father, as a choir boy, once sang solo in Manchester Cathedral. But that gene seems to have skipped me. I often listen to classical music on the radio, though never as background. I can't stand people who switch on the record player as soon as you arrive for drinks. Either we listen to Mozart or Vivaldi, or we talk. It seems daft to try to do them together, any more than one would hold a conversation during a screening of *Casablanca*. In fact, without thinking I usually stop talking altogether, waiting for the music to finish, to the host's puzzlement.

INTERVIEWER

You've been listed as prose editor for *Ambit* magazine for quite some time. Yet the magazine seems mainly devoted to poetry, and, I must say, very bad poetry, too.

BALLARD

I agree. In fact when people ask me what my policy is as the so-called prose editor I reply that it is to get rid of the poetry that infests the magazine. Of course, *Ambit* began life as a poetry magazine pure and simple, and the bulk of its readers, I would guess, are its present and would-be verse contributors.

INTERVIEWER

Most of your work is grounded in landscapes, whether real or imaginary. Shepperton and its surroundings play a large role. And certainly the United States, or at least images of the United States, are dominant in many pieces, completely so in your recent novel, *Hello America.* I wonder if you've traveled much

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in the States, or if you, like Kafka, in *Amerika*, made up your own.

BALLARD

When I travel, it's usually to the Mediterranean, where I go practically every summer. I visited the States in 1939 as a child; and in 1954, when I spent six months in Canada, I made short trips around the Great Lakes, to Detroit, Buffalo, Niagara, et cetera. I've never been to New York or Los Angeles, though I'm keen to visit. I don't think that handicapped me in writing *Hello America*; quite the contrary. Charles Platt recently criticized the book, not on the grounds of accuracy—he said it was wholly accurate—but for lacking authenticity. I feel he has the wrong end of the stick. *Hello America* is about that image which the States has chosen, in this century, to present of itself to the world at large. That image, and no country has been so consistent or effective in presenting an image of itself, is made up of its film stars and gangsters, presidents and their assassins, flashy cars, skyscrapers, Las Vegas, Disneyland, Cape Kennedy, the mafia, all-powerful advertising, casually-owned guns, Coca-Cola, blue jeans, street violence, drugs, and so on. I don't think there's any doubt that these constitute the image that the States has presented, and they would come first to the mind of anyone stopped in the street and questioned in Singapore, Sydney, Sweden, or wherever. Have they anything to do with life as actually lived in the States? Only marginally, I dare say. But I was trying to construct a society using just these images. I suggest you would come up with President Manson playing nuclear roulette in Las Vegas. It's not an incredible thesis, given that we now have a Hollywood actor playing nuclear roulette in the White House, with the latest "nuclear war is winnable" strategy endorsed by the Pentagon. Contrary to what Platt seemed to think, *Hello America* is pro-American, and ends in the triumph of those old nineteenth century Yankee virtues embodied in my old glass-airplane-building inventor.

INTERVIEWER

In one sense, in the midst of technological decay and over-

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load, you uphold a conservative yet paradoxically protechnological view . . .

BALLARD

I'm certainly no Luddite.* The whole drift of my mind is pretty clearly stated in my work; basically, one has to immerse oneself in the threatening possibilities offered by modern science and technology, and try to swim to the other end of the pool. I think my political views were formed by my childhood in Shanghai and my years in a detention camp. I detest barbed wire, whether of the real or the figurative variety. Marxism is a social philosophy for the poor, and what we need badly now is a social philosophy for the rich. To Americans that means Ronald Reagan, but I'm thinking of something else, some moderating set of values, whether the *noblesse oblige*, the obligation owed to the less fortunate by the old English upper classes, or the Buddhist notion of gaining merit. Apart from anything else, the modern communications landscape creates a different system of needs and obligations. I've written about that in much of my fiction.

INTERVIEWER

What about your reading? Does your writing hamper or dictate your reading?

BALLARD

I think my reading has grown more quirky and idiosyncratic with the years. At present I'm reading and rereading Martin Gardner's *Annotated Alice*, both for the text and for Gardner's brilliant marginal notes, without really realizing why. I try to keep an eye on what is going on. I was very impressed by John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*, a masterpiece in its way. As far as reading for research is concerned, I've always been very fortunate in my friends. For years, Dr. Christopher Evans, a psychologist in the computer branch of the National

* One opposed to technological change; the term "Luddite" derives from a group of British workmen who, in the early nineteenth century, destroyed labor-saving machinery to protest the rise in technology.

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Physical Laboratory (whom I visited regularly until his death—his lab was just a ten-minute drive away) literally sent me the contents of his wastebasket. Once a fortnight, a huge envelope arrived filled with scientific reprints and handouts, specialist magazines and reports, all of which I read carefully. Another close friend, Dr. Martin Bax, sends me a lot of similar material. The sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi is a restless globetrotter who culls Japanese and American magazines for unusual material. Vale, the San Francisco publisher of the Re/Search series—with excellent volumes on Burroughs and Gysin, and the latest Industrial Culture Handbook—is a one-man information satellite beaming out a stream of fascinating things. Readers of mine send in a lot of material, for which I'm grateful. The leader of the rock group SPK, who visited me a week ago, told me that he believes that there is a group of some two or three thousand people in Europe and the States who circulate information among each other. Sadly, modern technology, which ought to be so liberating, threatens all this. Already, I've received the first video cassettes in the place of the old envelopes crammed with odd magazines and cuttings. As I don't own a video recorder, the cassettes sit unseen on my bookshelves; the first volumes of the invisible library. One of my daughters reported on one tape, "It's rather weird, all about autopsies."

INTERVIEWER

One odd thing I've noticed about the varying responses to your work is that some people think it's extremely funny, while others read it in an extremely serious way. I know I've had both responses to the same piece—though usually at different times. What do you think?

BALLARD

A tricky question. I've always been accused of being a humorless writer. *Crash* strikes me as very funny, reading a paragraph aloud used to have me in fits, because in a way it's so preposterous. And *The Dead Time* has strong elements of a concealed humor of the same kind. But then, existence itself is a very special kind of joke.

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INTERVIEWER

Now, that old chestnut: Do you have any advice for young writers?

BALLARD

A lifetime's experience urges me to utter a warning cry: do anything else, take someone's golden retriever for a walk, run away with a saxophone player. Perhaps what's wrong with being a writer is that one can't even say "good luck"—luck plays no part in the writing of a novel. No happy accidents as with the paint pot or chisel. I don't think you can say anything, really. I've always wanted to juggle and ride a unicycle, but I dare say if I ever asked the advice of an acrobat he would say, "All you do is get on and start pedaling. . . ."

—**Thomas Frick**

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Michael J. Rosen

Refrigerium*

Because distance becomes tumescent in the heat
the haze erases buildings out of walking range.
We've considered walking as far as the backyard
and spread a quilt there, one huge book the three
of us hold open as our fingers hold
our separate texts. Lemon slices, sugar and ice
shook until the cubes melted and bruised the rinds,
we downed the pitcher in minutes, refilling
the leftover party cups half a dozen times.
Now, absently declining verbs that end in "i-o-r,"
you fish out the lemons and nibble the implacable
pulp, setting the sections in the mown grass
like phases of a lunar calendar for the world
our quilt describes. "Tonight the meteorologist
says to watch for Jupiter, just left of the moon."
(You'll have it reassembled by then?)
Out of the same nowhere the planet will come
you announce that. Oh let the lemons lie there,
upended yellow boats, their empty inboards
so clean and white, let them always ferry
such distractions from ourselves.

* a song of respite to quench the burning souls in hell

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Robert Carnevale

Exemplary

Trees rehearse
the gestures of fire.
"This is how we will burn,"
    say the trees.

Each afternoon the arbor stretches
a black ropebridge across the lawn,
used on occasion by a child.
"One at a time,"
    he says to his shadow.

Swallows in precise song
revisit each gifted and fugitive Spring,
even those they will never see.
"Like this," say the birds, "like this,"
up into the soaring quiet.

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James Laughlin

The *Non*-World

is too much with me daylong and
in my dreams my mind is invaded

by persons who are irreal all the
weirdos about whom Herodotus told

such magnificent lies the succu-
lent girlfriends of Sappho and the

tormented & tormenting in Ovid
adulterous ladies in the castles of

Provence who dread the coming of
the dawn sad sacks in Villon the

pranksters of Ariosto the drunken
and infected buddies of Rochester

it's an endless list must I burn
all my books to get rid of these

interlopers I should get back to
the real world I must listen to

Jesse Jackson and help him dis-
pose of that Hollywood cowboy.

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Joseph Lease

Overshadowed by Colors

Overshadowed by colors
Like the deep
Sea of the dictionary
I experimented with bachelors
Giving them six
Feelings of a pin

Like a butterfly who is pinned
By sunlight colors
Touching on six
Spectrums of deep
Disintegrating hues the bachelors
Evaded the light into the dictionary

Now in the dictionary the word pin
Bachelors are dancing among colors
Lost in words like the deep six

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Two Poems by L. M. Rosenberg

The Bells of Saint Simon

I sail into the crooked gloom
and steer to bed beneath the shining tent
of paint we are experimenting with
and lay this poor drunkard down.
Our town's asleep—
wet wires and frozen glittering domes
under a roof of stars that fishtail out to space.
How many times at this same window have I leaned
to feel the same sheet-lightning crack
when bats revolve at the horizon
and morning slowly rises, plain and blue.

He sleeps like a fallen statue,
dragging a mountain of blankets as he rolls,
his Hebrew hair and beard severely wild.
The sleeping twilight grasshopper folds
her musical bones at morning prayer; delight
dismay colliding as the earth
raises its great sinking heart again
and listens to the shaken clamor of the air.
Five times the church bells break
the violet elements to gold;
three notes a bird calls in reply
as I press my hands against one booming heart;
church music and his breath
pulling like oars against the dark.

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A Suburban Childhood

Having a crush was how I existed—
how I spent recess; I wandered
dull fields gone brilliant
for one sullen boy who strolled scornfully by.
As if in a dream I boarded
strange buses, stepped down
and roamed through the flower-named
streets, past the one house lit up
from within; humming he loves me,
he loves me not yet . . .
past mounds of leaves burning
their acid of longing
till the violet dusk headlights
would splash me; behind them my mother
propped up at the wheel—her mouth open,
the doors of the car flying out—
as she grabbed for me, already screaming.

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Ron Padgett

First Drift

The writing of poems
and the living of life
seem to require
paying hard attention
to any and everything,
and experiencing
a kind of mental orgasm.
Yikes! Do I
mean that?
Unfortunately, I'm afraid
I did, dipped to scoop
an idea from the roadside,
the mental roadside that runs
alongside the mental highway
that leads to a mental hospital.
I have never been a patient
in a mental hospital, because
I think it would be an extremely bad place to be.
So I stay out.
And stay home.
And go down the street,
looking intently at everything.
Sometimes the people in the street
laugh and turn into sheet music
torn from the sky and left to flutter down
into the metaphor that hides behind the deity,
and will not show itself,
and that is very peculiar indeed,
like a basement beneath the ocean,
with a tree that grew through a sheet of glass

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on which your face was painted,
like a clown's, in the early morning,
when it was just starting to rain
and the animals are moving, and the tents
are rippling in the breeze, and inside Glenda
the chimpanzee is completing a quadruple somersault
from shining bar to shining bar.

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William Logan

August in the Straits

The great blue heron's tinctured swerve
fires its yellow bill with the trout's alloy.
Why in place of nature cure

a fluency that betrays the tongued
compartments of the phonograph?
Year after year the white oaks

open to the gaze of passersby,
ibis, stork, and crane sharing
the half-light of stalls

and center aisles of their immunity.
These theatrical arrangements aggravate
the loss and literature of their climate,

the slash and burn that serve
as *aide memoire* to the general text.
They contemplate strange alphabets, the dead,

limbs locked in politics of disbelief.
The coinage of their argument
choirs Roman marble in spotless halls,

the crow perched on the emerald Augustus.
Memoirs of empire, whose sharpened teeth
still coral the beaches. Even the echoes

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rearranging the plotters' camp
keep meters of the tidal shore, and long past darkness
the coast lights vibrate

toward offshore boats, floating like unpaid legions.
Against them, a mercenary breeze
whose pale moths wing like olive leaves.

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Daniel Halpern

Loose

You're loose,
sometimes good
and lonely almost
never, not alone
long enough.
You learned to live
feinting in and moving
away, quicker
than those who took you
seriously. But
anyone's quick
who doesn't need
to stay. With your arms
out in greeting,
your feet
already on the move,
it's only itinerary
leading you on.
And here you are,
out there,
lost to those
who didn't keep up
lost to those
still ahead.
Around the world
you've found
a little of everything
and you've given it back
until what is left
is what you first held,
what you think that was.

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Rachel Hadas

Whether

I Midpoint of summer. Horizontal light
picks out the fly in the dusty web; mousedroppings
fresh on my desk each morning; poems; letters;
bee dead or stunned or sunning on the sill.

On the wall the water lily poster,
the calendar, the photo of my father,
the sign that says NO TRESPASSING.
Emblems, emblems stare me in the face.

II Flipping a coin as augury. Heads or tails
sounds spermy, but still seems less accurate
than Greek (*korona* versus *grammata*):
crowned heads or letters—which?

Or pulling petals from flowers, that destructive
pastime of childhood. Loves me/loves me not.
Children/no children. Then the bald
unwinking sun-eyed daisy-head's discarded.

III Heigh-ho—the world and smell of fur and houses
of Peacham with their flags hung out for the Fourth.
Red and green and orange bursts of showers
drown out the silent moonlight.

After the mechanical waterfall
and American flag in lights at the end of the show,
a little voice says "Was *that* all?"
Barefoot children, draped in their parents' cardigans

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IV stagger about on dewy lawns. I, big
and barefoot, some days later
nearly set my foot on a snake in the road,
thinking it dead. It gathers its little body

and raises its head and makes as if to strike,
then slithers into brush. And here's another
that seems to be curled asleep in the ankle-deep dusty
ditch; as I bend, the guts are seen to be leaking

V out of its side. The restful posture is death.
Our barn, whose roof fell in
during the last fierce blizzard late in April,
gapes at the sky, half-ruined,

but stoical and waiting to be mended
or stoical because inanimate
and slowly settling back
down to foundation stones, to rough-hewn timbers.

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Albert Goldbarth

Gardening

for Morgan

Mouse-ear, quack grass, shepherdspurse, are beautiful
but weeds. Their greedy merits need another kind
of seeing than we normally bring. There is no sputtering
sun out there, no webworm egg, no lover snoring half-an-inch
away from your insomnia, that doesn't shine a light
a special vision is required for. The fetal eyelids
fuse around a star-chart in the 9th week that we'll never see
again, although for 5 months it's the universe

completely—then they open, and whatever other
message amniotic darkness means, it marks the first
faint understanding that transition is expected of us,
from then on, never ending, down to the smaller revolving
of night and morning, wakefulness and dream. In the story,
Persephone's annual underworld assignment links
the schedule of a single backyard peach tree with the
cosmos-wide
itineraries of gods—and so we see the cycles of light

in the outermost nebulae still travel at the rate
of local afternoon as it offers itself to an inch of
photosynthesis's sweetening alterations. Change is
written in the seeds of us and can't be erased from the
program.
When Inanna descends the Sumerian realm of the dead, she
needs to strip another silky layer at each new gate,
and be born finally into the central pit of it
naked—and so we see how every change is given its

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own threshold and its ceremony. If death is your name
on a stone, for instance, there's a tiny *grave* in every
gravel that precedes it, all your life; in certain moments
you're aware of these preparatory stages. Every blade
of grass may be a proof devoted to the rootedness of things;
and
so a garden says something of permanence. But we're
transients through the hobo ghettoes 30 little piled
calendar boxes are, each month. This month, this

tentative May, she's out there again, and making of these few
elements—"peach tree," "gravel," "grass," the neighborhood
portion of "sun"—the start of something certain kinds of
seeing take
to be important. Now she's working at the worms. And now
imploring the sky for water. As if the seasonal
mattered. As if a continuity carried through the only world
there is (of utter transformation). As if we remember the first
of the beauty we shed: that downy cloud-of-a-coat, the lanugo;

the webs; the gills; the wings; the flukes.

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Robert Louthan

Something You Want

Alone in the house your father built
and you've always lived in, you walk with your cane
toward the door to the basement.
You're old, and suspect you're senile,
but there's one thing you're sure you remember
correctly: that since you were born
the basement has been deepening,
at a rate that is always increasing,
and at the bottom there's something you want,
though you don't remember what.
You open the door and switch on the light.
It doesn't shine far enough. You can't
see the floor. Still, you start down the stairs.
Your eyes will adjust. As you reach for the banisters,
your cane drops. You never hear it stop falling.
The sound just fades away.
You follow it. You can always turn back.
You will take the descent a step at a time.

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Sherod Santos

Photograph of My Father

(Public Gardens, Berlin, 1948)

The sun's suspended like a drop of amber
Above the crescent of a colonnade,
And he is standing on a gravel path
Between turned-up rows of empty flower beds.

And all around the world's gone gray, like a lapse
In memory, as though someone had sketched
This scene in charcoal in a family album
So long ago that all of the small details,

Like the gardener's hoe, or the sunlight filtered
Through the linden trees, had gradually
Smudged away . . . Except how he's raised his hand
In just this way, as if, from beyond the frame

Of that afternoon, he would wave to a world
That was after he was—and in that wave
The soft corrugations of those massive
Clouds are moving again, and the upturned earth

Is trembling still from the troop trains passing
Just off to one side, streaming small bits of ash.

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John Updike

Ode to Fragmentation

Motion, motion.
Within the body cells
each nucleus rotates widdershins
and mitochondria hustle round and round.
All things move, even the continents and Polaris,
those epitomes of stability.
Sun and gravity
push and pull.
Moisture seeps, and night-frost splits.
Glaciers rub a sandpaper of boulders
down U-shaped valleys,
and tectonic uplift
in slow motion shatters the friable shelves of shale.
Carbon dioxide is washed from the air
or the roots of plants:
the resultant carbonic acid
pries loose the glittering grip of flint upon flint.
Dampness evaporates
rapidly from the skin of stone but lingers within,
transforming granite into clay,
which swells,
spalling loose thin flakes like bark from a rotting tree.

At the cliff's base builds a slope of scree.
At the ocean's edge
the waves in a Shakespearean tumult pummel with pebbles
gripped in the fingers of their froth
the shore;
their millennial frenzy carves
the dizzying gills
and the stacks of stratified sediment

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one sees from the cliffs at Caithness.

Breaking, breaking,
eaten, eaten,
the mother rock yields her sands and silts,
each grain of sand a monolith,
each Matterhorn a heap of potential till.
"The eternal mountains were scattered.
the everlasting hills sank low."
The sluggish rivers conduct their symphonies of erosion,
and the mites in the subterrene dark
mince finer their mineral meal.
No, nothing is "too, too solid."
All things mundane must slide and weather.
Heat and cold saw back and forth,
and wet and dry;
wind and water and ice and life
have powdered our planet's obdurate skin.
But
had not Earth's aboriginal rock
submitted to fragmentation's lash,
no regolith would have seasoned into soil,
and the imaginary
would never have taken root.

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All Little Colored Children Should Play the Harmonica

Ann Patchett

Sampson, Skipworth, Slonecker, Small, Smiley. Smiley, Grover T. There are still four people ahead of me on the list, I've got awhile to wait. The *s*'s, we're way the hell down there so we gotta hear everybody before our turn comes around. At first I thought I was miserable, but after the thirty-fourth audition (Claire Beth Fibral, who said God told her she could play the flute), I decided it was poor old Miss Neville who was having a rough go of it. She calls out a name on the list and hands over a piece of sheet music, asking if they can make any sense of it, most everybody says no. Then she asks them if there is anything in particular they think they could play. This is where she makes her big mistake, if you ask me; just cram something in their hands and talk about it later. Every kid says they's just sure they can play the so and so. The girls all say they can play the flute, the boys say the bass. They is all lying.

Some group of old white men decided all little colored children should play musical instruments, that it would keep their minds off breaking out store windows or sitting in front of the Five and Dime looking uppity. That's why we're all here now,

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Miss Neville says that's legislating. I think they must have legislated this one up in spring, when it was cool outside and music sounded real pretty. But this here's August and even the flies are looking for a house with the fan on. It's Miss Neville who's got to decide who's gonna play what. She's gotta listen to every kid in Central Valley Junior High blow or bang or strum on something before she can assign them a place in the school orchestra. Ain't no telling how long she's been the music teacher here, most everybody's got a story or a guess. Harvey Rachlin says his older sister was in Miss Neville's orchestra when she went here, and his sister is a grown-up woman now, with a baby and everything. Some people say that Miss Neville stays at school all the time, that they let her sleep under the piano or something. I can't figure her out; I crawled up on the bleachers to watch her for awhile and she looked like she was listening to all of them. You can tell by her face that she thinks every kid that comes up might really be able to play. Then when she really hears them her face gets kinda sick, like they were all hitting her in the stomach. I would think that going through an audition once would be more than any regular person could suffer, I don't know what it would be like year after year.

They've got the whole school mashed into this one basketball gym. The ninth graders get folding chairs, which they make a very big deal of. The rest of us get bleachers or the floor. I got this nice little spot between the door and the risers where nobody can step on me. From where I'm sitting the whole world is knees and ankles, not one person in there who cares a rip about keeping his socks pulled up or his shoe laces tied. You never think about feet until you're down there with them. Miss Neville calls out a name and then I see a pair shuffle onto stage and wait a minute, then shuffle back to their place, which has almost always been snatched up.

I don't want nothing to do with their spitty old instruments. No way am I gonna spend four years sucking on some piccolo that somebody sucked on before me. It had been my intention to keep Roy Luther out of school, sorta separating my class time from my free time, but this is an emergency.

Me and Roy Luther hooked up when I was six years old, so

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we've been together a little more than half of my natural lifetime. My daddy, Mr. Nigel T. Smiley, runs the numbers where he works in the bakery making fancy doughnuts. He used to let a couple of us kids sit in the back room with his business friends, we made the place look honest. One day I was hanging out on a cherry crate playing with this special aggie that had been my birthday present. This man comes over and says that it was a real fine marble, that he'd never seen a shooter quite like it. I say, Yessir. He says he'd like to have that marble for his little boy. I didn't look up, I was scared he was gonna take it. He says, wouldn't I like to bet him something for that aggie? He pulls out this silver bar, the size of three Havana cigars. Then I look up, it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen.

"We'll shoot us out some craps, boy." The man says to me, "I win, I take your marble home to my boy; you win, you get to keep this here harmonica."

Man, I'll tell you I wanted that thing. I didn't know what it was or how to use it, only that I'd die right then and there if I didn't get it. I nodded my head. The man dips one of his fingers into a tiny pocket on his vest. He must have just been eating Cracker Jacks or something cause when he pulled it out there were two dice hanging on it. The other guys, mostly soldiers that hung out during the day started coming around, checking out the action and laughing at me cause I'm the sucker. Just then, a big metal door smashes open and Papa walks in from the front room. Kids used to tease me about my father being white, cause he was always plastered with flour. Nobody ever said anything to him about it.

"What you doing with my boy?"

"Just a friendly game of craps, Nigel. Your little shark here's hot after my harmonica." He shook up the dice to show he meant business.

Papa looked down at me. "You gambling with this man?"

I was pretty little then, I just nodded my head yes. One giant, floury hand come swinging down through the air and clept me right above the ear. I went sailing off my cherry crate and slammed back against some drums of cooking oil. What everybody says about seeing stars ain't true. I saw big, furry spiders.

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"How many times I got to tell you kids? You never, ever gamble with a man without letting me check out the dice. Jesus you is a fool." Papa plucked the pair of spotted cubes out of the other fella's hand and rattled them around. "Loaded." He shook them in my face, "Loaded!" I thought he was gonna hit me again, but he walked into the other room and got a fresh pair. Everybody knew Papa used clean dice. He gave the new set to the man. "Now you talk about gambling with my son."

The man shook his head like a little black bunny rabbit. "Just joking with you, Nigel, just trying to teach the boy here a lesson, hee hee. He can keep his dirty old marble."

"You gamble with my boy, Mister." Papa picked me up with one hand and shook me like a sneaker with a rock inside. "You let the man roll first, Grover."

His roll came up two specks, Papa says Snake Eyes. I gathered up the dice and threw them out again. A howl went up. A two and a five, sweet, sweet seven. Roy Luther must have been the man's name, because it was engraved on the side of my "Hohner Marine Band." I thought it had a good, solid sound to it. I knew right away this was going to be my special thing. All the other kids in my family got something special. There's the oldest and the youngest, and the twins that get all their clothes to look alike and get their picture taken a lot, and my brother Wilson who has his very own fish, and Delilah who twirls in the marching band, and Albert who skipped two whole grades just for being smart. Up till now I never had a thing that made me me. I'd walk into a room and Mama would call me two dozen names before she could place who I was. That first night I was sitting there staring at Roy Luther when the twins come up and try to take him away. Mama tells them to scat, "That's Grover's thing," she told them, "Leave it be." I slept with Roy Luther between my head and shoulder, so I'd be sure to wake up if someone tried to make off with him. Me and Albert share a bed, he thinks it's him I don't trust, but I couldn't let it go. Albert slept facing the wall after that.

There was a good three years I didn't have too many friends. My brothers and sisters told other kids they didn't know me, even Mama made me stay a good piece behind her when we

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went out. My thing wasn't so much being a harmonica player as it was being a bad harmonica player. I played all the time, grinding up and down that same old scale any place I could catch my breath, in the bathtub, under the dinner table. I was as bad as Original Sin. It was like learning to talk all over again, except this time there was no one to listen to. My hands didn't know anything about playing harmonicas, they knew about marbles and baseballs, and my mouth was a gum-chewing mouth. There wasn't no music in that mouth when things started out.

Back then, I took Roy Luther to school. Every five minutes or so a new sound would come into my head and I would raise my hand, asking if I could visit the washroom or get a drink of water. If the teacher said yes I would dart outside and try blocking up a different set of holes, blowing harder or softer than the day before to see how it sounded. Somebody'd always rat on me and Roy Luther would spend the rest of the day sitting in the principal's desk drawer.

I got used to the way it was always cold, tasting part like a tin can and part like the old Lifesavers and ticket stubs I kept in my pocket. As much as I loved the sound, I loved just putting it in my mouth, letting it hit against a filling in my tooth and running a shock clear through my eyes. It got to where I couldn't walk through a door without someone saying "Grover, go way!" I'd shinny up into the sugar maple and stay there. First the birds all flew away, then after awhile they got used to me, I even learned a few of their songs. One morning I was playing outside the kitchen window before breakfast, I heard Mama say, "Listen to the nightingale, will you? Glory but that ain't God's finest bird."

And that's when things started turning around.

I sat under the front porch and played a fire engine and my little brother ran outside, hooping and hollering for everybody to come watch the fire. Then he spent the whole day looking for one. I sat in the alley behind the white grocery store and played "What'll I Do?" so soft you could barely hear it, and just about everybody that walked out of the store was humming that song without knowing why.

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It was like one day I was the stink bug somebody stepped on and the next day I was a fistful of wisteria. Mama stopped sending me outside all the time. I could play the things she heard in church on Sunday. When the radio went out I was the chief source of entertainment in the family. I got to sit in the red leather chair and blow my brains out till I got dizzy or my tongue went thick; once I got going I could feel the vibrations go past my jaw and head for my stomach. The whole family spread out at my feet, except for Papa, who would listen from the other room. On those days it could rain ice or be a hundred and five in the shade and everybody was happy. I could play the popular stuff and make them dance till they fell down. I could play the blues and break them in half.

Suddenly nobody remembered that I'd ever been bad. Now folks say, "Grover! Hey, Grover T., that sounds real fine, come play in my store," or, "Hey son, come sit in my diner where it's cool." Like we was all best friends or something. Mr. Thompson used to say I wasn't even to think about walking down the street where his soda fountain was; now he calls me over all the time, tells me I'm good for business. I go, he gives me free lemon cokes.

After school I went to the community library and tried to teach myself how to read music. The place had two or three books called "How To." I'd sit there for hours looking at the henscratches, trying to make sense of it all. Finally I figured out that each line was two spaces on the harmonica, and that the black spots were where my fingers should go and how long I should leave them there. I'd run down to the bathroom with the book inside my sweater and give it all a try. The guy who stacked the books caught me a few times, said I was a real stupid kid, then he'd show me how to do it. He said he had a girl once who played the harmonica, said that's why he dumped her. You play a long time and your lips go funny on you he told me.

On Fridays, Papa had me come down to the business to play while the men waited to find out who won the races. It seemed to calm them down a whole lot. They all wanted to hear the new Benny Goodman stuff, everybody liked swing. A bunch

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of their sweeties waltzed in and said I was awfully good. One of them said I was cute as hell, and I was only ten back then. Everybody made a circle around me and started laughing and clapping their hands. Papa told me to get him a cigarette from the front room. One of the women held my arm, told me to stay put, that she had plenty of smokes. Papa looked down at me, way down, like I wasn't any bigger than a lizard. He said go get him a cigarette. I did. He told me to light it so I did that too. He said he was glad to see I could do something useful for a change. The one with the peach-colored dress that swung way down in the back, the one who said I was cute, asked couldn't they have another song, maybe "Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer"? I looked up at Papa, he liked that song a lot. But he said it was a fool's song, that it was a good one for me cause any fool could play the harmonica. Then he ripped Roy Luther out of my hands. I felt all dizzy, like I couldn't breathe. He might as well have ripped off my face. All of the sudden I remembered I wasn't nobody, just another little nobody colored kid at the bottom of the barrel. Then I heard him blow, Lord, you'da thought they was killing a cow, *slowly*. His hands were so big and dry they couldn't move to change the scale. Nobody laughed, he wasn't the kind of person you'd laugh at. He didn't say a word, just gave Roy Luther back to me and left. After that, we didn't talk too much about music.

Miss Neville calls out my name. I am number sixty-nine and she looks like somebody's hit her in the stomach hard. She's this little bitty old white woman with her hair knotted to the back of her head in a vice.

"Grover T. Smiley?"

"Yessum."

She hands over a piece of sheet music, "Can you make any sense of this?"

I glance over it; it's something I already learned, a real easy piece. "Yessum."

She looks up a little bit, I'm only the third person to even say I knew what it was. "What would you like to play Grover? Do you know the bass?"

"No, Ma'am, I brought my own."

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The kids in the assembly hall aren't listening, most of them are asleep or whispering. Miss Neville sits down at the edge of the table and folds her arms across her chest. "Alright then."

"You want me to play this, Ma'am?" I hold up the music. I was hoping she'd say no cause I know stuff that's a lot prettier than this.

"That will be fine."

I pull out Roy Luther from my pocket and put him in my mouth real quick. If you go too slow, somebody always says, "Oh no, not the harmonica. I thought you could play a real instrument." I jump right in, without even getting a good breath. Miss Neville looks up, first to stop me and then to listen. After the first few bars the kids that were asleep wake up and the kids that were talking get quiet and everybody sits up real straight, like it was gonna make them hear better. Roy Luther has that sort of effect on people. I finish, it was an okay job I guess. Everybody claps real politely, like they were at a picture show. Miss Neville takes my arm.

"Do your parents know about this?"

She let everybody else go on. Carl Smith through Herman Zweckler got to miss their audition all together. Roy Luther and I were taken to the principal's office and asked to wait there.

Miss Neville comes in looking all pink and flustered. That's one thing you can say about white people, they're always changing color on you. She smacks this stack of sheet music in front of me and says, "Can you play this?" When I know she thinks I can't. I don't know what to do, if I should tell her no, that I can't read a note of the stuff and the other thing was just a freak of God, or that I can, which I could. Mama says to always tell the truth, Papa says to go with the flow. The piece on top is one of my favorites, Schumann's "Scenes from Childhood." I say yes.

Miss Neville tapped her foot real fast and looked at me like she thought I was crazy. Finally she threw her hands in my face and said, "Well then *play* for God's sake!"

I never heard a teacher take the name of God in vain before, it made me like her. I folded my lips into my mouth to get them ready and then pulled up Roy Luther. He tasted like my

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house keys. Harmonicas remind you that everything in your head is all hooked together, playing is a lot more than the mouth, it rolls into the back of your neck and through every tooth individually. My eyes don't read music anymore, it goes straight to my tongue and fingers, each pressing on the two different sides like they was trying to break through for company. My head likes this piece a lot. The notes sound real good in the little office and I start to forget all about Miss Neville and the school orchestra. I just keep my eyes on the paper and play. It's a real pretty song.

When I get through, Miss Neville is looking up at the ceiling real hard, like there's something important up there. I look up too. She turns around, all watery and pale again. She thinks I'm making fun of her by looking up, but she lets it go. "That was lovely, Grover."

I knock the spit out of Roy Luther and thank her kindly.

She swats at her eyes with the back of her hand. "Have you been playing the harmonica a long time?"

"Six, seven years."

"That's just fine."

"You want to hear something else? Some swing maybe?"

She looks like she's come back down now. "I'll have to contact your parents at once, your father has a phone where he works doesn't he?"

Papa didn't like being bothered at work. "You gotta call my folks?"

"Certainly, yes."

She rang up Central and got connected. Papa didn't like being bothered at work.

"Mr. Smiley? Yes, hello, this is Miss Neville down at Central Valley. I'm calling about your son. No, Grover. No, there isn't anything wrong, quite to the contrary."

This was news to me.

"It seems we have stumbled upon a rather remarkable musical gift . . . yes, I do think this is important. Did you know about the situation? About his music?"

I motion for her to hold the line, she put her little hand over the receiver. "Tell him it's about Roy Luther."

She looked confused so I nodded at her, the way Mama does

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us kids when we're not sure if we're doing something right. "Mr. Smiley? Grover says to tell you it's about Roy Luther . . . you know about that? Well, he demonstrates an amazing aptitude for the instrument. I would like to have a conference with you and your wife at once, to make arrangements to put Grover in a special program, perhaps even a special school. I've never seen a talent like this, Mr. Smiley. It is a force to be reckoned with."

I was sent home early with a "Gifted Child Form," and told that it should be completed and returned the next day so that plans could be made. The form was pretty easy stuff, name, age, place I was born. One space needed my middle name. I thought about it, I'd always just written Grover T., nothing more than that. I asked my folks about it, they said there were lots of kids, they couldn't remember no fool *middle* name. I wrote the T in the blank. It looked kinda stupid sitting there by itself. I wrote in Truman, because he's the vice president and seems like a real friendly white guy. On my form for gifted children my name was Grover Truman Smiley. It looked pretty good. Papa signed the form without reading it, said he didn't want no more *music* teachers calling him at work. I said I was sorry.

I found Miss Neville in the principal's office typing away. I gave her the form, which she clipped onto the thing she'd been working on.

"I've been doing a lot of planning for us, Grover." She didn't look at me, she just worked at her desk, shuffling and making notes in a little pad. Somehow it all looked real important, the way she was putting it together so carefully.

"I didn't mean to be a bother, Ma'am."

This stopped her dead. She laid all the papers back down and took hold of my hand, you could tell she wanted to be real nice. "You won't ever be a bother, Grover. You are the most important person in this whole school to me."

I looked at the floor, there was a little red ant making his way towards the bookshelves.

"Do you know how long I've been a music teacher?"

"No, Ma'am."

"A very long time, and I've had a few good students. Not very many, but enough to make it worth my while."

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She let go of my hand, I was glad and stuffed it in my pocket. She went beneath her desk and brought a wallet out of her purse. "I've kept photographs of all of them. I felt like they were my children." She unfolded this strip of plastic and out stumbled about five little colored children, one of them's got a violin and the next is standing beside a piano. They all look like regular kids, they's all smiling. "Every one of these children had a chance to be very fine musicians, to do something important with their lives. And do you know what happened?"

"No."

"Well, Charles Hunt," she pointed to the kid with the piano, "He got a job in his uncle's filling station, and my prize pupil, Cynthia Rachlin, she married a checkout boy at the A&P and had a baby."

It was old Cindy Dobbs, Harvey Rachlin's big sister.

"And all the rest of them did about the same. They all had a chance and gave it away. I didn't become a music teacher to force children with no musical ability to join an orchestra, I simply wanted to find the ones who could make something of themselves. This," she held up the papers, "is my letter to the governor, it's all about you and . . . and . . ."

"Roy Luther."

"Yes, I've told them how talented you are and what I think we should do about it. They'll listen to me."

"You wrote the governor?" I rocked back on my heels a little. I remember seeing his picture in the post office. He was the only person besides famous criminals who got his picture there. "You think he's going to want to hear me play? You think he's got a favorite song or something?"

Miss Neville licked the envelope and pressed on a stamp with the heel of her hand. "I'm positive you'll play for the governor someday, you might even play for the president of the United States." She smiled at me for a second and then her face got all busy again. "Of course, you won't be playing the harmonica then, you'll have learned a real instrument."

I thought I must have heard her wrong. "Ma'am?"

"Grover, you certainly don't expect to become great while playing a bucolic instrument."

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I wasn't even sure what she said, but I knew what it meant. I could feel myself getting lightheaded, the same way I did the night Papa tried to play. I never talked back to a teacher, come to think about it, I'd never talked back to anybody. I wasn't looking to cause trouble. All I ever wanted to do was play, maybe someday get that job in the bakery that every kid in the world wanted. Miss Neville was going to mail the letter.

"If it's alright, I think I don't really want to play for the governor after all." It sounded pretty polite to me.

"I wouldn't worry about it too much."

"Do you think I shouldn't be playing the harmonica?"

She let out this big breath and turned around, she didn't want to miss the postman. "I think you've done a wonderful job with what you have. I think all little colored children should play the harmonica if it would help bring them to the point you're at now. But people get older and they move onto different things. That's where you are now, that's why I'm trying to help you."

I drew in my breath, which is a lot. "No. No thank you, Ma'am."

She was just as surprised as I was. "I beg your pardon?"

"They're talking about giving me a job at the theater, playing before the Sunday matinee. I'd like that, playing my harmonica for people." I tried to look at her, but decided best that I go before I lose my nerve. I darted past her out the doors and down the front steps. I could feel her watching me run down the street with Roy Luther flat inside my hand, her holding onto the letter.

By the time I got to Mr. Thompson's soda fountain I was all out of breath. I stood there for a long time, just fogging up the glass. Every now and then I'd take my thumb and make a mark showing I was there. I wondered if she'd mail the letter, but I was pretty sure not. She'd find somebody else for her wallet quick enough.

Mr. Thompson caught sight of me standing on the sidewalk. Any other kid he would have run off, but he calls me inside and asks if I'd please play him a song. Old Cindy Dobbs was sitting at the counter with her baby and gives me a nice smile, asks how I'm doing. Mr. Thompson says, "What do you feel

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like humming up today, Grover?" Suddenly I knew that everything was good, so I tell him, anything he's wanting to hear. They decide on "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree With Anyone Else But Me." Then he draws me up an extra large lemon coke, but I ask him, wouldn't he please give it to Mrs. Dobbs, cause I'm not so thirsty. I slip in Roy Luther, he tastes like butterscotch Lifesavers and warm nickels. I play so loud that people come in off the street to listen. It's the best feeling in the world, when you're playing one the people really like, especially when it's a happy song. If you ask me, nobody gives the happy songs half enough credit.

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James Laughlin and Hugh Kenner

The Mixpoem Program

Introductory Note

Mixpoem started with James Laughlin's curiosity about every possible arrangement of the words in Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro":

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

By "every possible arrangement," he clearly implied only the arrangements that make a sort of sense. That meant keeping the syntactic framework, such as it is, and shuffling the instances of the same part of speech. "Metro" consists of five nouns, three articles, three prepositions, two adjectives, and one demonstrative pronoun. Transposing the two adjectives is trivial, and reshuffling the prepositions or the articles is uninteresting. Obviously, what Laughlin had intuited was a noun shuffle. So the assignment came down to this: write the poem over and over *with its five nouns permuted every possible way*, thus generating lines such as the following:

> The bough of these crowds in the apparition;
> Faces on a wet, black petal.

Five words have $5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 120$ permutations. That meant 120 separate versions of the poem, and a lot of repetitive typing. Computers were invented to do repetitive chores. So I wrote a little program in BASIC that handled the "Metro" job (and nothing else). Then I got interested in a general-purpose mixer-upper. Hence "Mixpoem."

It asks you to type in your initial text, marking the words you want permuted with slashes fore and aft, like this:

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The /apparition/ of these /face/s in the /crowd/;
/petal/s on a wet, black /bough/.

Since only what is between slashes gets permuted, whatever takes the place of "face" or "petal" will acquire the terminal *s* outside the slash, and be automatically pluralized. Also we can arrange to have the first character of a line uppercased automatically, which is why I left the capital off "petal." The twenty-four times "petal" is in that position it gets printed "Petal," but "bough" when it moves there will likewise become "Bough," and so on. (And if you are dealing with William Carlos Williams, you can turn the automatic capitalization off.)

"Mixpoem" lets you designate up to seven words for permuting and won't accept any more. The reason for this restriction is that as you increase the number of permuted items, the number of permutations soon gets impractically large. We've seen that permuting five words yields 120 variations. But six raises the total to 720, and seven to 5,040, which is absolutely all the printout anyone can conceivably bear to scan. (An eighth word would bury you under 40,320 different versions!)

Achieving all possible permutations without duplicating proves not to be as easy as it looks. The BASIC programmer will think of nested loops, which was what I had used for the "Metro" challenge. But if you use nested loops you must know in advance just how many items your program will be permuting. So that method wouldn't handle an unspecified number of words that might be as low as two or as high as seven. My colleague Joe O'Rourke showed me an elegant affair called Trotter's Algorithm, and Trotter was what I used.

Trotter's Algorithm seems to have been devised with an eye on a classic permutation problem: ringing the changes on a set of bells. Unlike strategies that work in the obvious filing-clerk way—hold each word in place while doing everything possible with all the others—Trotter weaves its variations in and out pleasingly.

I wrote "Mixpoem" in Pascal, my language of choice for any-

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thing complicated. A BASIC version would certainly be possible, but that is for someone else. Anyone who would like a copy of the Pascal listing may send me a request c/o The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore MD 21218.

—Hugh Kenner

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A Selection of Computer Permutations of Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro"

The apparition of these faces in the bough;
Crowds on a wet, black petal.

The apparition of these boughs in the face;
Crowds on a wet, black petal.

The apparition of these faces in the bough;
Petals on a wet, black crowd.

The apparition of these petals in the face;
Crowds on a wet, black bough.

The apparition of these petals in the bough;
Faces on a wet, black crowd.

The bough of these petals in the apparition;
Crowds on a wet, black face.

The apparition of these petals in the bough;
Crowds on a wet, black face.

The apparition of these petals in the crowd;
Faces on a wet, black bough.

The apparition of these boughs in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black face.

The crowd of these apparitions in the bough;
Faces on a wet, black petal.

The crowd of these apparitions in the petal;
Faces on a wet, black bough.

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The crowd of these petals in the apparition;
Faces on a wet, black bough.

The crowd of these petals in the bough;
Apparitions on a wet, black face.

The bough of these petals in the crowd;
Apparitions on a wet, black face.

The bough of these petals in the crowd;
Faces on a wet, black apparition.

The crowd of these petals in the bough;
Faces on a wet, black apparition.

The crowd of these faces in the bough;
Petals on a wet, black apparition.

The crowd of these faces in the bough;
Apparitions on a wet, black petal.

The crowd of these faces in the apparition;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The face of these crowds in the apparition;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The face of these crowds in the bough;
Apparitions on a wet, black petal.

The face of these crowds in the petal;
Apparitions on a wet, black bough.

The face of these petals in the crowd;
Apparitions on a wet, black bough.

The petal of these faces in the crowd;
Apparitions on a wet, black bough.

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The bough of these petals in the face;
Apparitions on a wet, black crowd.

The face of these of these petals in the bough;
Apparitions on a wet, black crowd.

The face of these petals in the apparition;
Boughs on a wet, black crowd.

The face of these apparitions in the petal;
Boughs on a wet, black crowd.

The face of these apparitions in the bough;
Petals on a wet, black crowd.

The face of these apparitions in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

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James Laughlin's Alba

I tell the birds you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a

more lovely music she has been
speaking to me in my dreams the

birds protest that it has always
been their task to arouse me for

the day do not disturb our lives
they say very well I tell them

you may still sing at dawn but
only in her praise you must imi-

tate her voice or I'll not lis-
ten I will be deaf to your song.

Note on "Alba"

I first learned of albas when I was studying with Ezra Pound at his "Ezuversity" in Rapallo in 1935. I had seen two of his own albas in *Personae* and asked about the form. There was his little "Imagist" alba, which he placed in the book beside the famous "In a Station of the Metro":

As cool as the pale wet leaves
of the lily-of-the valley
She lay beside me in the dawn.

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and his version of the "Alba Belingalis," perhaps the earliest surviving Provençal alba, which he first translated when he was at Hamilton College in 1904:

When the nightingale to his mate
Sings day-long and night late
My love and I keep state
In bower,
  In flower,
'Till the watchman on the tower
Cry:
    "Up! Thou rascal, Rise,
    I see the white
        Light
        And the night
            Flies."

The elegant rhyming renders the complicated rhyme schemes of Provençal poetry; in the approximately two thousand troubadour poems which survive there are, perhaps, seven hundred different rhyme patterns. Pound spent at least twenty years tinkering with these old poems. Sometimes he succeeded brilliantly, but often he had to resort to archaic English words and inversions of normal word order to get his rhyme. Yet I think there is no question that these exercises helped give him his mastery in prosody and his exceptional skill in melopoeia.

To see what Pound actually did with Provençal, compare the original of "Alba Belingalis":

Quan lo rossinols escria/
Ab sa/ par la nueg e-l dia,/
Yeu suy ab ma bell' amia/
    Jos la flor
Tro la gaita/ de la tor
Escria/: drutz al levar!
Qu-ieu vey l'alba/ e-l jorn clar.

I think that one of Pound's great problems in these translations was that most Provençal words are quite short and their sounds somewhat jagged, while our normal English words are

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longer and their sounds flow together more. Hugh Kenner analyzes Pound's procedures for translating in his book *The Pound Era*.

Pound explained to me that "alba" means "the dawn," which becomes "aube" and "aubade" in French, and that it first turns up in Provençal poetry toward the end of the twelfth century. It is a song which expresses the sorrow of lovers that they are being separated by the coming of day. Or, as Pound characteristically put it, "That's when they gotta get back to their own beds in the castle." With some troubadour poets "alba" also had a philosophical connotation, a vaguely millenary notion of the return of the earthly paradise. Some scholars believe that the alba descends from watchmen's cries in the night, which is borne out by the text of "Alba Belingalis"—though, perhaps Pound was attracted to the alba because of its connection with lovemaking.

The birds in my poem derive from Pound. Of course, they are also the birds outside my window, but much more they are the birds of Clement Janequin's sixteenth century "Song of the Birds," with which Pound opens *Canto 75*, using Gerhart Muench's score for violin from a lute reduction by Francesco da Milano. I heard Olga Rudge, a very fine violinist, play the piece in one of Pound's concerts in the Town Hall in Rapallo. And I heard the same birdsongs when we were making the documentary film of Pound's life and, with our Swiss soundman, Florian Eidenbenz, we went chasing those "rossinols" through the woods below Bertrand de Born's castle of Hautefort.

—**James Laughlin**

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Hugh Kenner's Nine Permutations of "Alba"

I tell the birds you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely music she has been
speaking to me in my songs . . .
I will be deaf to your dream.

I tell the birds you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely song she has been
speaking to me in my dreams . . .
I will be deaf to your music.

I tell the musics you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely song she has been
speaking to me in my birds . . .
I will be deaf to your dream.

I tell the musics you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely bird she has been
speaking to me in my songs . . .
I will be deaf to your dream.

I tell the birds you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely music she has been
speaking to me in my dreams . . .
I will be deaf to your song.

I tell the musics you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a

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more lovely song she has been
speaking to me in my dreams . . .
I will be deaf to your bird.

I tell the musics you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely bird she has been
speaking to me in my dreams . . .
I will be deaf to your song.

I tell the songs you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely music she has been
speaking to me in my birds . . .
I will be deaf to your dream.

I tell the songs you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely dream she has been
speaking to me in my birds . . .
I will be deaf to your music.

I tell the songs you can stop now
I no longer need you I wake to a
more lovely bird she has been
speaking to me in my musics . . .
I will be deaf to your dream.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Michael Covino lives in Berkeley, California, where he writes film reviews and feature articles for *The East Bay Express*. His first book of poetry, *Unfree Associations*, was published in 1982 by Berkeley Poets Workshop & Press. A collection of short stories is forthcoming from Persea Press.

Mary Morris's second collection of short stories, *The Bus of Dreams*, will be published by Houghton-Mifflin in June, 1985. She teaches at Princeton University.

Ann Patchett is a student at Sarah Lawrence College. "All Little Colored Children Should Play the Harmonica," which won a 1983 Henfield Foundation/ *Transatlantic Review* Award, is her first published story.

Larry Woiwode's most recent novel, *Poppa John*, was published last year by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. He currently teaches at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

POETRY

Robert Carnevale lives in New York City.

Albert Goldbarth is the author of many books of poetry. He teaches at the University of Texas at Austin.

Daniel Halpern is the editor of *Antaeus*. His most recent book of poetry, *Seasonal Rights*, was published by Viking in 1982.

Hugh Kenner, Professor of English Literature at Johns Hopkins University, is the author of many works on modernism, including *The Pound Era* (1971). His most recent book is *A Colder Eye: The Modern Irish Writers*, published by Knopf in 1983.

James Laughlin is the publisher of New Directions and a celebrated poet, translator, biographer and quick-change artist.

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Joseph Lease is a recent graduate of Columbia College, where he edited the *Columbia Review.*

William Logan's second book, *Difficulty*, will be published next year by Godine. He teaches at the University of Florida at Gainesville.

Robert Louthan's recent book is *Living in Code* (Pitt Poetry Series). He is the president of MicroLit.

Ron Padgett and Trevor Winkfield recently published *How to Be Modern Art* (Toothpaste Press). He is currently editing the collected poems of Edwin Denby for Random House.

Jim Powell is a graduate student in classics at the University of California at Berkeley.

Michael J. Rosen's first book of poetry, *A Drink at the Mirage*, will be published this year by Princeton University Press. He is the literary director at The Thurber House in Columbus, Ohio.

Sherod Santos is spending this year in Paris on a Guggenheim Fellowship. His first book of poetry, *Accidental Weather*, was published by Doubleday in 1982 as part of the National Poetry Series.

Gjertrud Schnackenberg, winner of the fifth Bernard F. Conners prize for a long poem, was the 1983 Rome Prize Fellow of the American Academy-Institute of Arts and Letters. Her second book of poetry will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 1985.

L. M. Rosenberg teaches at the State University of New York at Binghamton, where she co-edits the magazine *Mss.*

John Updike's new collection of poems, *Facing Nature*, will be published by Knopf in 1985. He lives in Massachusetts.

INTERVIEWS

Edwin Frank's poem, "Snake Train," is forthcoming in *The New York Review of Books.* He is currently living in Paris.

Thomas Frick currently lives above the Ho Toy Noodle Factory in Chinatown, Boston. He is the Director of Planning at MicroLit.

Andrew McCord is currently at work on a movie in India.

FEATURE

Robert Becker is the art editor of Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine, and a contributing editor of *The Paris Review* and *Art and Auction.*

Andy Warhol is the publisher of *Interview* magazine. His illustrations for Mac Hyman's story, "The Hundredth Centennial," appeared in issue #7 (Fall/Winter 1954–55) of *The Paris Review.*

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ART

Austė was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1950, and lives in New York. Her paintings and drawings have been included in exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Houston Museum of Fine Arts, and Tracey Garet Gallery, New York.

Robert Longo was born in Brooklyn in 1953, and lives in New York. His paintings, sculpture, and drawings have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Tate Gallery, London, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Metro Pictures, New York.

Peter Schuyff was born in Baarn, Holland, in 1956, and lives in New York. His work has been exhibited at the University Art Museum, Santa Barbara, Milwaukee Art Museum, and a recent one-man show at Pat Hearn Gallery, New York.

M. Louise Stanley was born in Charleston, West Virginia, and lives in Oakland, California. Her work has been exhibited at The New Museum, New York, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, The Oakland Museum, and Quay Gallery, San Francisco.

The Paris Review is pleased to announce the following:

- *Norman Rush is the 1984 winner of the Aga Khan Fiction* Prize for his story, "Instruments of Seduction," which appeared in issue 93.
- Gjertrud Schnackenberg is the fifth winner of the Bernard F. Conners Prize for her long poem, "Imaginary Prisons," appearing in this issue.
- Rudy Wilson has been awarded a General Electric Foundation Award for Younger Writers for his story, "Impressions," which appeared in issue 91 of *The Paris Review*.
- "Nairobi" by Joyce Carol Oates, which originally appeared in issue 87 of *The Paris Review*, was included in the 1984 Volume of *The Best American Short Stories*.
- Susan Minot's story, "Lust," which appeared in issue 91 of *The Paris Review*, will be included in the 1985 *O. Henry Prize Stories Collection*.
- Jonathan Galassi, poetry editor of *The Paris Review*, is the 1984 winner of the PEN/Roger Klein Award for Editing.

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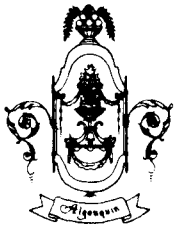

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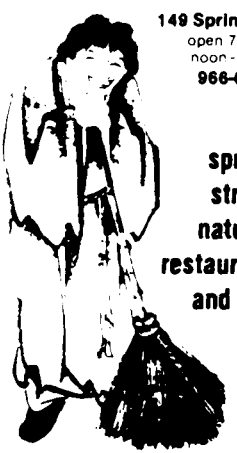

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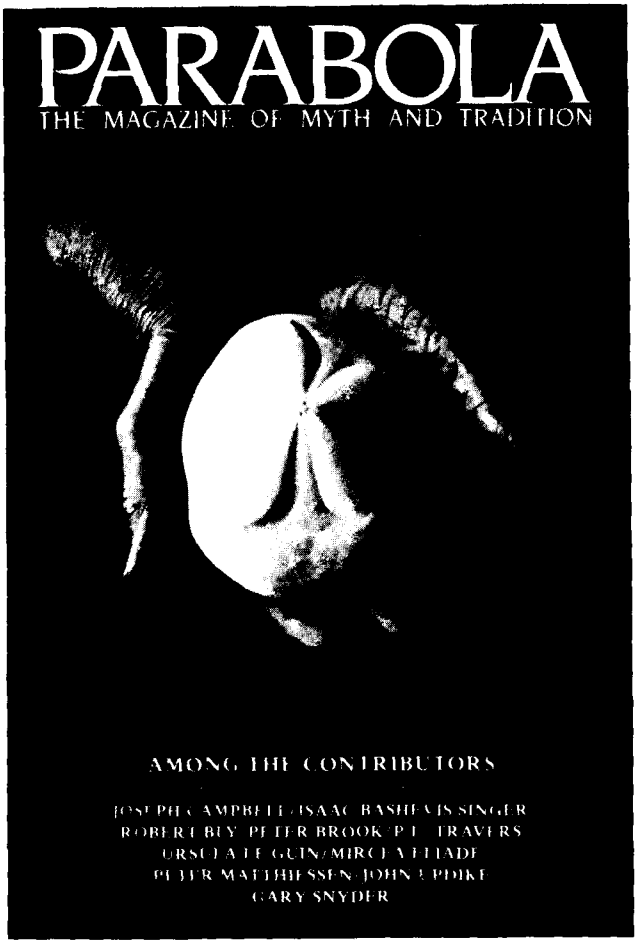
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in·cen·tive \in-'sent-iv\ *n* [ME, fr. LL *incentivum*, fr. neut. of *incentivus* stimulating, fr. L, setting the tune, fr. *incentus*, pp. of *incinere* to set the tune, fr. *in-* + *canere* to sing — more at CHANT] **:** something that incites or has a tendency to incite to determination or action **syn** see MOTIVE — **incentive** *adj*

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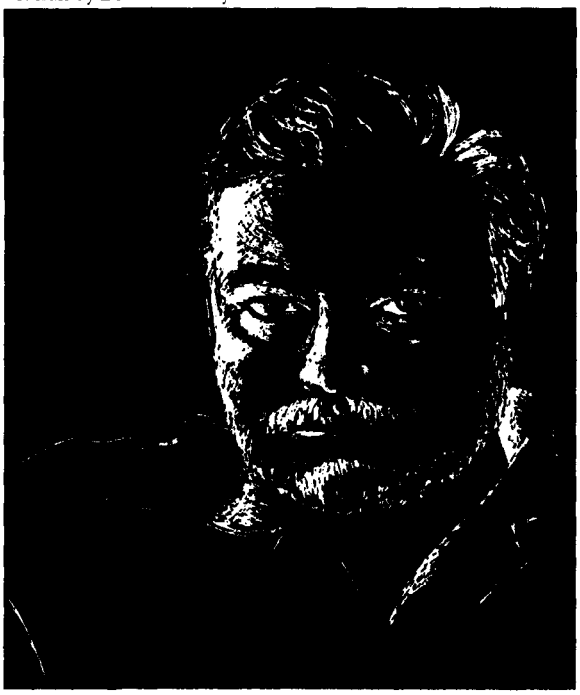

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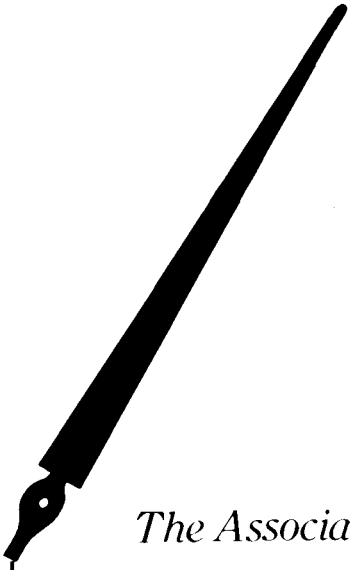

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